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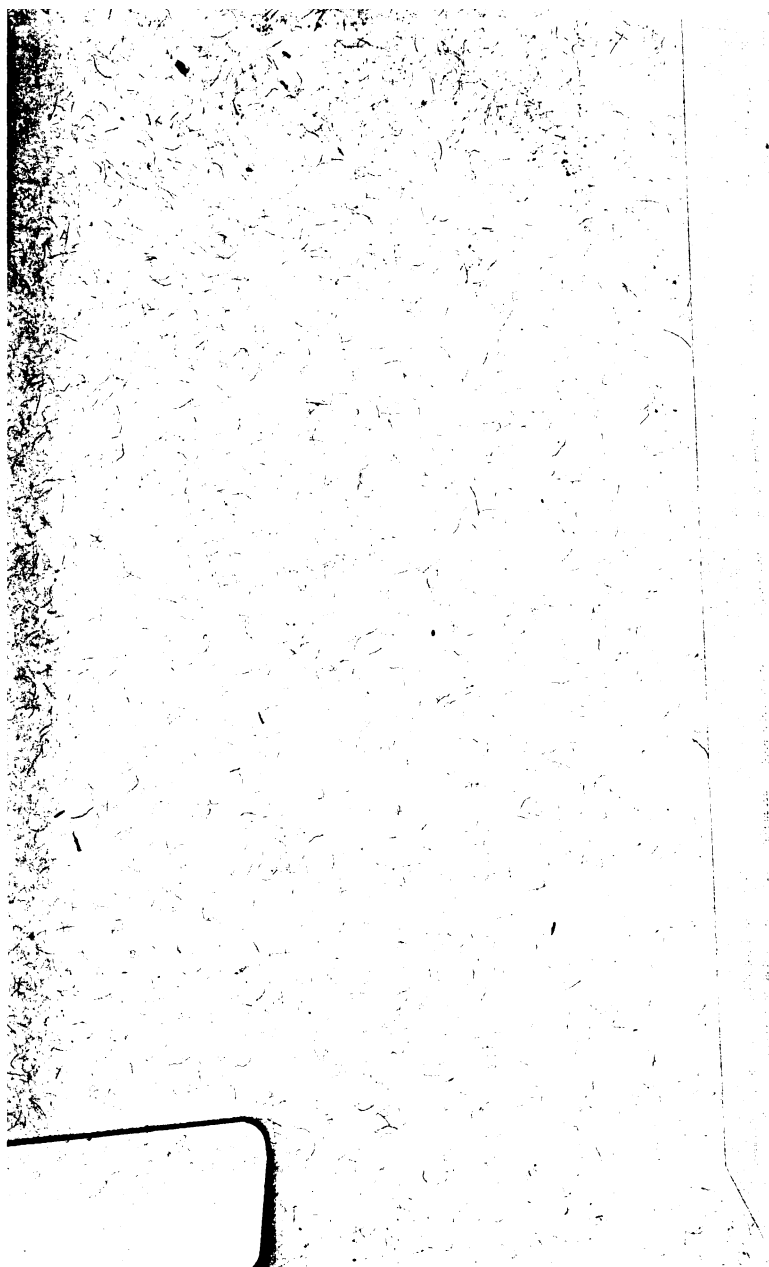
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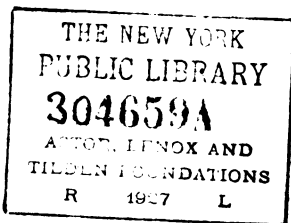
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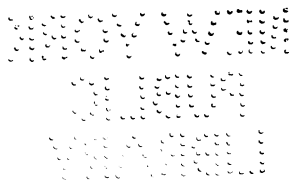
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THE MERSHON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

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"I FORBID THE BANNS!"

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

ON FLYING FISH.

"MY dear Charlton, I say 'Bismillah! Allah illa Allah! kismet!' and so forth."

"Quite so; and these dark phrases being interpreted into the language of the accursed Giaour mean that——"

"That when a thief's hour is come he may be captured, even by a policeman."

"It strikes me that has about it a certain Teutonic flavor. Will you oblige me with the application of your adaptation of this pretty free translation of the German proverb?"

"What, you cannot see it for yourself?"

"Proverbs are like prophecies, my friend; they are susceptible of being interpreted to suit the exigencies of the hour, and of the interpreter. Now what are your exigencies, oh, diplomatist?"

"Why, man, can't you see that the drift of my fatalism and of my proverbial philosophy is, that when a fellow comes face to face with the right girl, he can no more resist falling in love with her than—than——" the speaker looked around for a *simile*—"than--than one of those flying fish

can help dropping back to the water after it has skimmed along for thirty or forty yards?"

Mr. Cyril Southcote pointed airily with his left hand over the ship's side, where, with a flicker of fins, a dozen flying fish shot out of the water and fled along the surface. A watchful sea bird, not being impressed with the absolute obligation on the part of nature to help out the resources of human philosophers, made a swoop for the flying fish and secured a fine specimen.

The little group on the deck of the steamship *Carnarvon Castle* watched the transaction, and a general laugh arose.

"That young 'un," remarked Captain Waring of the Royal Bayonetteers, sending a puff of cigar smoke in the direction of the fish, which was very rapidly being assimilated into the digestive system of the bird. "That young 'un managed to help dropping back to the water, anyway."

"It wasn't exactly the one I had my eye on when I made the remark," said Southcote, as airily as ever. "But you see what happened to it, because it was not clever enough to act conventionally, and as it was expected to act."

"It got chawed up a bit," said Waring sententiously.

"Quite so; you perceive the moral?"

"Oh, come into the smoking room and have another game of poker," said Waring. "It's time for us to have a deal at poker when he begins to talk of morals."

Julian Charlton gave a little laugh, but showed no intention of moving.

"Say that we don't perceive even so obvious a moral as is pointed by your incident," he remarked to Southcote.

"Of course you are joking. Why, I do believe that Waring here must perceive how aptly my contention was illustrated."

"He's pretty well hanged if he does," growled Waring. "Come and have a peg and a poker."

"You were giving it as your impression that a man is bound to fall up to the eyebrows in love when he meets with the sole woman out of the millions on the earth's crust who—well, who is meant for him; that's a bit clumsily put, I admit, but it has the advantage of being understood of the people."

"And that's more than can be said of Southcote's philosophizing. Now what about that poker?" said Waring.

"You have made a very good attempt to put my humble impressions into a few words," said Southcote. "That being so, you will certainly perceive that that fish which was silly enough not to return to the water five seconds sooner than the others took their headers, represents the man who refuses to obey the dictates of his better nature—who fancies that he will rise superior to a law that is as universal as the law of gravitation, and who comes to grief in consequence. Is that plain enough?"

"Great Cæsar!" cried Waring, "he's trying to make out that that bit of a fish was sent by Providence—like Jonah's whale, by George—to illustrate a theory."

"I'll not venture to suggest, Southcote," remarked Julian Charlton, "that the attraction of gravitation might not have done for the fish as effectually as its flight through space—the maw of a shark is not fundamentally different from the gizzard of a molly-mawk—but I take it that you believe—to be more correct, that you wish us to believe that you believe—that there is no crawling in love, that it's all falling."

"You have hit the nail on the head at last, Charlton. I'm for the long drop."

"Oh, the long drop be hanged!" said Waring, putting his hand *through Charlton's arm* while Southcote laughed.

"The long drop be hanged! Come along for that poker before the steward's bell rings for dinner. You're too good a listener, Charlton, that's what's the matter with you—it's the matter with both of us, and it has encouraged the diplomatist until he is ready to talk us out of house and home."

"I'll finish this business with you another time, Southcote," said Charlton, suffering himself to be led away to the smoking room in the midships deck house of the steamship *Carnarvon Castle*.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CUTTING OF CAMEOS.

WHEN Waring and his victim had disappeared within the deck house, Mr. Cyril Southcote gave a little laugh, which he meant to be expressive of the subtle enjoyment which his intellectual achievements conveyed to his own senses. It was his belief that his intellect stood out as a white cameo does against its dull background. If his intellect was the cameo he had no difficulty whatever in assigning to the combined intellects of his friends the position of the dull background against which his own—clear cut and finely finished to a hair's breadth—became the more conspicuous. He was not a vain man : he only believed that his own intellect was the cameo and his friends' intellects the background. He felt it to be his duty to see that this homely commonplace surface was not wasted. As a background it had a destiny to fulfill. He seldom felt that he had any reason to reproach himself for neglecting his duty, in respect of making the cameo conspicuous by keeping the background in its legitimate position. People occasionally said he was scarcely so clever as he seemed to be. When a whisper now and again reached him to this effect, he was accustomed to find fault with his background. It manifested certain inartistic irregularities. The cameo was all right. And so he fancied that he always cut the figure which he wished to cut.

He was clever enough to be a fine art auctioneer, and unscrupulous enough to be a statesman of the first rank.

He was generally clever, but he was sometimes *good-natured*.

People who had met him once or twice said they believed he could do anything he aspired to do in the world. If their opinion was correct, the result of his career was simply to show how modest had been his aspirations.

People who had known him for a year said they believed he would yet make his mark in the world. He may have fancied they were right until he had entered upon his thirtieth year. After this date, however, he was accustomed to smile when it was hinted to him now and again that a man of his cleverness should make a mark in the world.

"My dear sir," he said upon one occasion, when he knew there were persons present who would be careful to give his phrases circulation, "there are only three men of whom it may safely be predicted that they will make their mark in the world—the man who cannot write, the miller, and the chimney sweep."

To say so much, however, was not to say distinctly that he did not mean to distinguish himself eventually.

When he was thirty-two it was suggested that he should endeavor to make a name for himself.

At this suggestion he also smiled ; but his smiles at this period were scarcely so bright as those of an earlier date.

"My parents have saved me the trouble of making a name for myself : they have given me a very good name."

His reply was apt. His parents had not Hiramé or Habakkuké away his chances in life. The name of Cyril Southcote was so pleasing to pronounce that people pronounced it out of the pure pleasure of the thing. After pronouncing it some people felt as self-satisfied as if they had delivered an epigram or a quotation from Swinburne. This being so, his name was pretty frequently repeated in society.

His father, Sir Montague Southcote, was the only one who did not seem to find pleasure in uttering his name, *Sir Montague* was a general officer, a K. C. B., a K. C. M. G.,

and a knight of many distinguished orders—some made in Germany, others of home manufacture—and he frequently employed his son's name as a proper noun which required to be qualified by several improper adjectives. It was usually made by Sir Montague the center round which the harmless lightnings of military profanity played.

People said it showed that there were some estimable points in Cyril Southcote's nature when he remained on speaking terms with his father.

The simple fact of the matter was that the general, who had distinguished himself for the energy with which he had suppressed certain native risings, for which his administration of the affairs of a particular district was alone responsible, believed that there was a heredity in chances as well as in genius, and he was, consequently, disappointed that his son was not so fortunate as he himself had been in running through the gamut of knightly distinctions.

His son had obtained in the course of ten years several diplomatic appointments, but had held none for any length of time. He was too clever to be a diplomatist, the chiefs under whom he had served were accustomed to assure his father, when the general, on hearing of Cyril's periodic reliefs from duty, had associated that name which sounded like a musical chord with the elements of the supernatural.

But in spite of the fact that he was so frequently relieved from duty, Cyril managed to spend every penny of the liberal allowance made to him by his father, and a good deal more besides. It was this that caused Sir Montague some irritation. His son endeavored to explain to him that observing men and women carefully could not possibly be called a waste of time. The general declared in response that it was the waste of money he objected to; and he was not altogether reassured when he was reminded by his son that a complete system of observations, whether of the *aberrations of heavenly bodies* or of earthly, could

not possibly be maintained without the expenditure of money. The transit of Venus, he explained—"The transit of Venus——"

But here his father, who, it was commonly reported, knew more than any living man of the aberrations of this particular planet, became distinctly discourteous in his language, and once more expressed a desire that Cyril might be removed by supernatural agency.

Cyril, however, got all the money he asked for.

He was now on his way to England, after resigning his post of private secretary to the Governor General of the Castaway Islands.

As for the men who were now engaged with a few others in dealing out the cards for a game of poker in the smoking room, they were in the eyes of Cyril Southcote a very colorless lot. Waring was a captain in the Bayonetteers, and Julian Charlton was a young Englishman who possessed a considerable amount of property to which he was now returning after traveling over the face of the globe. He was perhaps a colorless man. Most white men are. He had no subtle theories of life, and he had not spent any large sums of money in collecting data that might eventually be applied to the solution of all psychological problems. He was content to take people as he found them, and without asking searching questions.

Before Cyril Southcote had been more than a few minutes leaning over the steamer's side, having lighted a fresh cigar, feeling that he had shown a considerable amount of adroitness—such an amount of adroitness as he was justified in expecting from himself—in turning the flying fish illustration, that threatened to be a fiasco, to his own advantage, he heard a voice beside him.

"What was the subject of that very interesting conversation that you had with Mr. Charlton and Captain Waring?" asked an agreeable voice at his elbow.

"It was with Charlton I was conversing, Miss Travers," he replied; "Captain Waring is an officer of Bayonetteers, and therefore does not converse."

"I think he talks more than Mr. Charlton."

"Yes, *talks*, that is true; but I said converse."

"You are too subtle for me, Mr. Southcote. But may I not know what was the subject that engrossed your attention?"

"Why should you not, Miss Travers?" said Cyril, looking straight into the brown eyes of the girl, with a smile that was meant to assure her that he understood her much better than she understood herself. "Why should you not? We were discussing one of the simplest phenomena of life."

"You said a good dinner was a phenomenon of life the other day," remarked Miss Travers when he paused. "Were you discussing what curry we shall have to-day?"

"Oh, something infinitely simpler—merely the phenomenon of falling in love."

"Oh! you call that a phenomenon?"

"For want of a better name. Can you suggest a better?"

"I would not dare to try to improve upon a word of your selecting, Mr. Southcote. But if it is so very simple as you say, what on earth was there to talk about—I beg your pardon—to converse about, in regard to such a topic?"

"Every woman," said Cyril, "has a personal interest in every conversation that goes on in her neighborhood on the subject of falling in love. One should not talk of accidents in the presence of a railway director."

"I cannot at this moment see what you mean, but I have a vague idea that you have said something clever. One knows when there is electricity in the air even though *one is not dazzled by a flash of lightning*."

"In the phenomenon of falling in love a woman represents the precipice."

"I understand now ; I knew it was in the air. But suppose there is no falling, Mr. Southcote ?"

"Then there is no love—according to my theory."

"Of course—according to your theory."

"Yes, I am no believer in crawling into love, Miss Travers. One crawls into friendship—one occasionally drifts into matrimony, but in love one falls."

"How nice it must be to be a connoisseur in such matters, such as you are, Mr. Southcote—to be able to define at a moment's notice under what letter of the alphabet certain incidents in life must be indexed."

Cyril did not like the way Miss Travers made this remark. It suggested a sneer at his wisdom.

"It may, perhaps, be more interesting for you to learn that the same view of these matters is not taken by Mr. Charlton," he said in a low tone, after glancing around him, as if to satisfy himself that no one but Miss Travers could hear his words.

"More interesting to me ?" said the girl in a voice that suggested surprise as well as inquiry. "Why should it be of any interest to me to learn what Mr. Charlton's views on this or any other subject are ?"

"I cannot tell why it should be so," replied Cyril, with a very good imitation of a Frenchman's shrug. "But I can assure you that Charlton's profession of faith embraces the crawling process. His idea is that gradually and insensibly—he did not say senselessly—a lad and a lass become subject to the influence of that phenomenon which goes by the name of love. Now sixteen days must elapse before we reach England."

"You speak more incomprehensibly than ever, Mr. Southcote," said Miss Travers. "It is impossible for any *ordinary intellect* to grasp your meaning—assuming that

you have any meaning to be grasped. You talk about—what is it?—crawling—influence—phenomenon—love—goodness knows what—and wind up with a casual remark touching the speed of the vessel. Now can you blame me for failing to understand your drift?”

“I would not blame you, even if you did not understand, Miss Travers,” he replied, with a smile that was meant to re-assure her that her soul lay fully exposed to his view.

Miss Travers was irritated by that smile, because she knew its meaning. It is almost indecent for a person to give you to understand that your soul lies fully exposed to his scrutiny. Surely one has a right to claim a little privacy for one's own soul.

“I would rather that you remained incomprehensible than rude, Mr. Southcote,” said she with quiet dignity; and lest he should have some reply ready—which would be extremely irritating—she walked away and reseated herself in her deck chair, and endeavored to become more interested than ever in the novel which she had abandoned in order to take part in what seemed to be a most profitless conversation with Mr. Southcote.

It so happened, however, that the conversation was not profitless, and she was aware of this fact. She was extremely interested in whatever views Julian Charlton held on the “phenomenon of love”—as Mr. Southcote chose to call it. Marian Travers was the daughter of a certain high commissioner who had been sent out to the Cape to settle some question as to the delimitation of native territory—a question which was so important that no one at the Cape could understand it, consequently the Colonial Office was obliged to send out a high commissioner to increase its importance—and complexity. The climate of Cape Colony suited the somewhat uncertain constitution of *Colonel Travers*. A long residence in India had impaired

his health and had caused him to feel now and again that he had seen his best days. He had seen his best days, consequently the Colonial Office had appointed him high commissioner.

Miss Travers had met Mr. Charlton at a Government House dinner; then he had dined at the residence of the high commissioner and had enjoyed some horse exercise with Miss Travers and her father upon the Flats; and when it was understood that Miss Travers was going on a visit to England for a month or two in the company of her friend Mrs. Howard, the wife of Major Howard of the Engineers, and that Mr. Charlton was taking his departure by the same steamship, no one at the Cape regarded the matter in the light of a remarkable coincidence.

It is pretty generally understood that the development of a certain friendliness between a young man and a maiden is largely, but not wholly, dependent upon their environment. Miss Travers had not lived for many years in the world, but she had lived quite long enough to have become fully aware of this fact. She had good reason to believe that a friendship which is begun on land may be consolidated on the sea, even though the element is by no means suggestive of consolidation, but just the opposite. She had known of instances in which a friendship begun on land had developed into something very much stronger on sea.

All the same, however, it was on the verge of insolence for Mr. Southcote to smile at her in the way he had smiled, giving her to understand that it was in his power to scrutinize her very soul. It would not have been so irritating if she could but have felt that he had failed to perceive what was on her mind, if not exactly upon her soul. But when it so happened that she found it necessary to assure herself that Mr. Southcote was a self-conceited coxcomb who flattered himself on being so extremely clever that he *could scrutinize at will* the soul of a young woman, when

as a matter of fact his powers were very limited, she knew that she did well to be angry.

She felt, however, that she would be able by her future bearing to prove to Mr. Southcote that he was not quite so clever as he fancied himself. (She actually believed that she could make a man be satisfied that he was less clever than he fancied himself to be.) The extraordinary amount of attention which she was paying to the novel that lay on her knees should, she felt, go far to convince Mr. Southcote that he had given himself credit for much more cleverness than he possessed.

And all this time Mr. Southcote was watching her, but without giving the smallest indication of so doing. The result of his observation, lasting over twenty minutes, was to convince him that the author she had chosen was not altogether enthralling. He noticed that she did not turn over a page during this space of time.

He felt that up to the present he had never done full justice to his own cleverness. He felt that he was really far cleverer than he had ever fancied he was.

For having been the means of evoking so agreeable a reflection, he admired Miss Travers more than he had ever done. He had quite forgiven her for having tried to appear clever at his expense.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE CAPTAIN'S PROFANITY.

IT was evening. The dinner in the saloon of the *Carnarvon Castle* had been excellent. In several subtle elements it had surpassed even the most remarkable of the previous efforts of a cook who was always trustworthy and who was occasionally inspired. It was generally admitted by the saloon passengers that he had had some moments of inspiration during this day.

This is what the cabin passengers thought of him. The second class passengers sneered at him, and occasionally grumbled. The seamen invariably growled at him and occasionally cursed him.

The captain was sitting on a deck chair, a pretty little girl on a cushion at his feet, with her arm upon his knee. Her pretty little mother was on a deck chair placed at an acute angle to the captain's. At exactly the same angle on the other side was a Madeira chair in which Mrs. Howard—also a pretty woman, but not of the little type—was sitting. Further round was a camp stool occupied by a girl with very fair hair and large, soft eyes. She was the daughter of a gentleman who, having gracefully failed at the English bar, was made a judge at the Cape. Her name was Lily Joyce.

The captain had promised the husband of the pretty little mother of the pretty little girl to look carefully after both mother and daughter on their voyage to England. He had promised the judge to look carefully after the young lady with the fair hair, and he had been told by Major *Howard* that his wife would look after herself, and that he

would be wise to let her do so. He was now carrying out his instructions to the letter. He was an extremely conscientious man to be the commander of a large steamship with his heart set on breaking records. He was also a cautious man, and he invariably steamed at full speed ahead through fogs, for he was so extremely careful of the lives of his passengers he would not ask them to remain a moment longer than was absolutely necessary in the middle of a fog.

He had had a variety of strange experiences in the course of his life.

He said he had hunted in Leicestershire.

Some people believed him.

He had had many opportunities of reading when on long voyages, and he had made good use of the time at his disposal. He was a diligent, if a desultory reader.

He held certain theories on the subject of *Hamlet's* madness.

He never brought his wife on a voyage with him.

He was now sitting very much at his ease, narrating a pleasant little story of how he had fought some hundreds of pirates in the cool of an evening in the China seas. This was meant for the ear of the little girl on the cushion at his feet. At the same time he was replying to the inquiries of the judge's daughter as to the feasibility of the steamer's anchoring alongside the Tower of London in order to give her an opportunity of exploring that historic building previous to going on to Westminster Abbey by a barge. Miss Joyce was under the impression that nearly all the passenger traffic of the river Thames was conducted on barges, with silken canopies aft, and sixteen rowers in fourteenth century costumes. Her ideas of the Thames were derived from an intimate acquaintance with the pictorial title of the *Illustrated London News*.

At the same time the captain was recounting to Mrs.

Howard the last scenes in the life of a common friend named Captain Timothy O'Connor—he was reported to be of Irish extraction—who had been suffering from chronic alcoholism and had unfortunately died when on the voyage to South Africa to join his regiment.

It cannot be denied that the captain was fully employed.

"Yes, my dear," he was saying, passing his hand over the curls of the little girl, "it was a curious position for a man like myself, who cannot boast of being brave, to be placed in. But when I found that I could not run away, I made up my mind to sell my life dearly. I was at the maintop of the bark when those yellow ruffians scrambled on board. There were, I should say, three hundred of them, more or less, all armed to the teeth. I took a steady aim with my revolver, and their chief was seen to throw up his arms as he fell back to the water. His lieutenant rushed forward to break in the door of the deck house where I had locked my passengers. Once again I took aim; the ball passed through his chest and, striking the brass handle of the door, knocked down an enormous Malay who had found an ax and was in the act of—— I beg your pardon, Miss Joyce? Oh, yes, I would strongly advise you not to go to an hotel in the Minories for the sake of being near the Tower. I am sure your friends live further west, and they can take you there any day. And so, my dear, the fight went on for some hours, not one of the savages having the least idea that the shots were coming from the maintop. They were being thinned down a bit toward the sunset, and what a sunset it was! But there was a single cloud. It sickened me, my child, for it was just the color of blood, and I have always been absurdly sensitive in these matters. The ghastly faces of the hundred and fifty—more or less—Malays that were lying on the deck, just as I am this minute—that is, I mean—— *I really cannot agree with you, Mrs. Howard; I don't*

think the surgeon was so much to blame. It is a most difficult thing to say what should be the exact point to which one should reduce the drink of a man who has accustomed himself to a quart of Irish whisky a day. It is a delicate question, especially when that man meets the steward carrying a bottle of brandy and holds a revolver at his head until the transfer is made. It was that last bottle of brandy that did for poor O'Connor, Mrs. Howard. He locked himself in his cabin, and after half an hour we heard him singing in a slightly husky way a song called the 'Cruiskeen Lawn.' What do you say, Miss Joyce—Mme. Tussaud's? Certainly, it is a place where ladies are constantly seen. No, I don't think you can go to it by the river. I beg your pardon, dear, I am not forgetting you. Well, the sight of that blood-red cloud made me feel—— God bless my soul! What's that?"

The captain had started up, for there sounded over the deck the noise of an explosion and the hissing of escaping steam. Up through the engine house gratings there came dense clouds of vapor. The captain made for the engine room companion and plunged into the arms of the chief engineer, who was rushing up the iron steps. Then the propeller ceased churning up the water astern, and the steam began to blow off by the legitimate pipe. Both the captain and engineer vanished in the clouds that rolled up from the motionless machinery.

CHAPTER IV.

ON ITALIAN PROVERBS.

THE passengers on the deck of the *Carnarvon Castle* were alert. Here at last was a Topic. With a topic life aboard an ocean liner assumes a freshness which passengers have long ceased to associate with life. It is the absence of a topic that causes so much nonsense to be talked on the ocean.

It is a certain rule of life that when a man has exhausted every available topic of conversation with a woman, he tells her that he loves her. Sometimes, when the woman is unmarried, he asks her to marry him. It is the instinct of The Male, evolutionists tell us. He feels that he must make himself interesting to The Other. He tries to do so, and probably succeeds so long as a topic remains. When the last is exhausted he is in despair. It is then that his instinct tells him that by assuring her that he loves her he succeeds in making himself quite interesting in her eyes.

The accidental shipment of a man suffering from an hereditary disease known as Delirium Tremens prevented the passengers aboard a steamer in which I once took a voyage from feeling solitary. He had a trick of creeping out of his berth with a knife at nights that was extremely enlivening. We had a clever young surgeon aboard, and he cured the man.

Before we reached land we had all proposed to one another.

The passengers aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* perceived in a moment that a Topic had at last come to them. Even if *no more harm* had occurred than the bursting of a steam

pipe it would, if used economically, provide conversation for the remainder of the voyage.

Cyril Southcote saw that Julian Charlton made his way to where Miss Travers was standing holding the ship's rail with her right hand, while her left was pressed to her side. Her face was somewhat pale, but the expression upon it was one of anxiety rather than actual fear. She looked very statuesque at the moment when Charlton hurried to her side.

Cyril saw this from his seat at the lee of the deck house. He had not left his seat when all the other passengers had started up and had hastened to where the captain had disappeared—all except the more cautious ones, who had placed themselves within easy reach of the boats. Mr. Southcote was not impulsive. He knew that he would learn soon enough what had actually happened.

"You are not frightened," said Charlton as he approached.

It was about an even chance, Cyril thought, whether Charlton would offer his hand to Miss Travers or forbear. That offering of the hand would, he felt, be the appropriate dramatic gesture to accompany the inquiry.

Charlton forbore.

"No, I don't think I am frightened," replied the girl. "I don't think that I am frightened—now."

Cyril heard the words. He noticed the little pause that gave unmistakable emphasis to the "now." Surely Charlton would offer her the protecting symbol of his hand at this point.

Julian Charlton did nothing of the kind.

"You are right not to be frightened. Nothing has happened of any consequence."

"But the engines have stopped."

"Of course; but that is nothing to cause one to be alarmed. I believe that only a small steam pipe is leaking. The engineer has turned off the steam to prevent the pipe from bursting."

"It does not sound very formidable, does it, Mr. Charlton?" said Miss Travers after a pause.

"It is quite a trifle, I am certain," said he. "Nothing ever happens aboard these big steamers."

"Is it possible that there is a tone of regret in your voice?" said the girl. "Why do you want things to be happening?"

"I don't," said he. "I want things to jog along as quietly as possible. Jogging along is true happiness, if people only knew it."

"So the Italians think: '*Qui va piano va sano*,' you know."

"They are right."

"And yet the Italians are not much given to taking long voyages in ocean liners."

"No; they have reasons of their own which outweigh the prospect of a quiet voyage. People who eat quantities of olives, and swallow macaroni stewed in grease and garlic are not ideal passengers by sea."

"Mrs. Howard does not seem to possess much of the Italian's wisdom who invented the proverb," remarked Miss Travers. "She has been rushing between this and the fringe of the crowd round the engine room companion since the accident."

Mrs. Howard was going neither softly nor wisely. She gave one the impression of being decidedly alarmed. She was hurrying past Marian Travers when she heard her name spoken.

"What do you say?" she cried. "How can you stand there as if nothing had occurred, when perhaps the boiler or something has burst?"

"We were discussing the proverbial philosophy of the Latin races," said Julian Charlton. "We find that their proverbs are opposed to hurry and nervousness."

"Don't be absurd. Have you any idea of what has happened? Did you ever see such ridiculous fools as those

people make of themselves crowding round the engine room companion? I tried to force my way through them to see what was actually the matter; but they stood firm. It is the boiler, I suppose. Where would that cloud of steam have come from if not from the boiler, I should like to know?"

"I don't think it is the boiler," said Charlton. "When a boiler bursts people in its immediate neighborhood are, as a rule, left free from all doubt as to what has happened."

"But something burst. And the captain cried out 'God bless my soul!' Surely that counts for something?"

"Certainly, unless the same recording angel is the officer of the day as the one who did duty when my uncle Toby swore," said Charlton.

"Your uncle Toby? Don't talk nonsense. You have no uncle Toby. What has your uncle Toby to do with the angels, and what have the angels to do with the captain? He said 'God bless my soul!' distinctly. Look at those idiots standing beside that boat as if they were waiting for it to be launched. What fools people do become when anything unusual happens! I don't suppose it is much, after all. Why don't you force your way through that crowd and find out if anyone is killed? I never saw a funeral at sea. I believe it is extremely picturesque and touching, and all that sort of thing. Are you not interested in this business, Mr. Charlton?"

"Not in the least, Mrs. Howard. If anything serious has happened we shall know about it soon enough."

"There is Mr. Southcote," said Marian with malice in her heart. "He knows everything that happens in heaven above, and in the engine room beneath, and in the waters under the ship—or at least he fancies he does. He will satisfy you, Mrs. Howard, you may be sure."

"You think so? Then I will go to him. Ah, it is at such a time as this that a woman misses her husband most deeply. If poor Vincent were but here he would have

found out all long ago. This suspense is worse than a fever. If we are forced to take to the boats, Marian, don't forget to fetch your spirits of wine for the curling tongs' lamp. I used my last drop this morning."

She hurried across the deck to where Cyril was still seated. He had heard what Marian had said, and he prepared for the worst.

There were few people whom he could not repel with a well-directed epigram.

"Mr. Southcote," cried Mrs. Howard, "why did the captain shout 'God bless my soul'?"

"For the same reason the engineer turned the steam off the boiler with a rush into the safety valve, Mrs. Howard—to relieve the pressure due to circumstances."

"Is this a time to be clever? What on earth do you mean?"

"Profanity is the safety valve of human nature, Mrs. Howard," said Cyril.

The lady gazed at him vacantly for a moment and then turned right round without a word and made for the surgeon, who had just come up from the engine room, and was pleasantly mopping his face.

"Doctor, I am distracted with the cleverness of people, and I have come to you for a change. You are a sensible man; tell me, in one word, what has happened. Is it the boiler, or something else? Is anyone dead below? Are we to return to the Cape, or to go on to England?"

"In one word, Mrs. Howard," said the surgeon, "precious little has happened to disturb anyone. It is not the boiler, but something else. No one is particularly hurt, and I believe we shall be on our way to England, home, and beauty in half an hour."

"And yet the captain cried 'God bless my soul!'"

"Then in his name I retract the expression," said the *surgeon*.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE ORIGIN OF A MAN.

THE captain followed the surgeon up from the engine room in about half an hour, and the chief engineer, looking very grimy, put in an appearance shortly afterward, and went straight to the cook's galley. He got a small piece of raw beefsteak from the cook, and returned, holding it to his left temple. He went down once again to the engine room, and the steam continued blowing off through the escape pipe.

"He has got a black eye," remarked one of the passengers, who kept their gaze riveted upon the engineer until he had disappeared. "Yes, you'll find it will be purple to-morrow, and a pale yellow the day after—I know every change pretty well—until it fades away into one of the new Liberty tints. There's nothing like raw beefsteak for hurrying up the colors."

Sure enough, the chromatic alternations predicted by the passenger took place with the utmost precision in the region of the engineer's left temple. The next day his forehead was like a tropical sunset as described by Mr. Clark Russell more than once, and these splendors gradually dissolved into a delicate saffron.

Meantime, however, the exact nature of the occurrence in the engine room had been found out by the passengers. One of the steam tubes had burst, the captain explained to his numerous questioners. The damage was insignificant; but to make the repairs it was necessary that the ship should proceed at half speed and anchor at the island of St. Helena for the greater part of a day. The trifling

injury done to the chief engineer's forehead comprised the entire list of casualties due to the accident.

The explanation satisfied all the passengers except two. The first was a gentleman who had tuned the piano, the second was a gentleman who had repaired a sewing machine a lady had aboard, which had failed to work as it should. It was not to be expected that two such mechanical experts would be satisfied with an explanation that was not fundamentally technical.

They shook their heads and whispered together every evening after dinner; and they hoped that all aboard would gather that, though they refrained from bringing against the captain any direct charge of deceiving the passengers, still, if it came to a Board of Trade inquiry, they——

They continued shaking their heads.

It was only on the second morning after the accident that the island of St. Helena came in sight of the ship's company of the *Carnarvon Castle*; but owing to the fact that the steamer was going only at half speed, several hours had passed before the sound of the heavy plunge of the waves along the base of the great cliffs that make the island an ideal prison for a person whose aspirations take the form of the conquest of Europe, was heard.

The vessel steamed within a biscuit-throw of the southern cliffs. They are not much to look at; but these cliffs can never be approached without interest, except by such persons as are altogether wanting in imagination. The sound of a bugle rang out from one of the forts under which the steamer was passing, and the figures of a few soldiers were seen on the roadway cut in the face of the cliffs.

On a deck chair on the steamer sat a youth who, at the first mention of the name of St. Helena, had unearthed from his traveling library a volume of Byron. He was

now engaged in reading for an admiring circle of yawning girls the poem commencing

'Tis done, but yesterday a king.

It is a tolerably lengthy poem, but the youth droned it out to the very end.

It was very fine, the girls declared.

It was scarcely clearly understood that the verses referred to Napoleon Bonaparte.

Some of the listeners had an idea that the author had, late in life, written a very clever play called "Our Boys." Others were under the impression that the verses referred to the late Emperor of the French.

All were unanimous in pronouncing the poem very fine indeed ; and they sprang to their feet when it came to an end, and left the reader alone upon his deck chair.

While the faint mumblings of the man at the ode mingled with the solemn response of the man at the wheel as the captain sang out his instructions, Cyril Southcote was smoking a cigar with his back to the bulwarks of the ship and the bulwarks of the island.

"For the first time," said he, "I begin to realize the exact spirit in which the schoolboy who was asked 'What is an ode?' replied 'Something that's odious.'"

"It is very funny," said Miss Travers, who had long ago thought it prudent to forget that Mr. Southcote had offended her by reading her soul without first asking her permission. "It is very funny ! Listen to the combination."

The elements of drollery were certainly to be noticed in the mingling of the lines of the poet and the litany of the pilot. The steamer was rounding a point while the reader was warming to his work. The result of a blending of the voices was somewhat droll.

"It is very funny," said Julian Charlton. "Are you going ashore when we let go the anchor, Miss Travers?"

Miss Travers replied that her guardian, Mrs. Howard, had made up her mind to pay a visit to the commanding officer of Engineers at James' Town, and his wife, and intended taking Miss Travers with her on this strictly professional enterprise.

"And you, diplomatist—are you going ashore?" Charlton asked of Cyril.

The diplomatist declared with a laugh that he meant to remain aboard the steamer, the fact being that the deputy governor of the island was one of the many administrators whom Mr. Southcote had governed in the capacity of private secretary. There was a tradition at the Colonial Office that whenever the Secretary of State for that department bore a marked grudge against any administrator, he sent out Cyril Southcote to be his private secretary.

It was generally admitted that any minister for the colonies who would desire a worse fate to befall his bitterest enemy than to have Mr. Southcote sent to him as private secretary, would indeed be implacable.

"I can without difficulty imagine a scheme of happiness that does not include paying a visit to any place within the sphere of influence—that is a strictly diplomatic phrase—of Sir Ebenezer."

These were the exact words employed by Mr. Southcote to explain how it was impossible for him to go ashore at James' Town.

Miss Travers laughed most agreeably, and in a very joyous way, when he had spoken. She had no trouble whatever in laughing joyously when Mr. Southcote had made use of, or fancied he had made use of, some phrase embodying an exquisite slight.

She never again so far forgot herself as to be clever before him. It was far better to laugh joyously at his cleverness.

But when he was out of hearing she ventured to express

some surprise that the authorities should exercise so strict a supervision over the visitors to the island as necessitated the attendance of the deputy governor in person at the gates to scrutinize the face of every applicant for admission.

"Let us hope it is not quite so bad as that," said Charlton. "I am inclined to think that Mr. Southcote rather overestimates the extent of the political significance which would attach to an incidental visit of his to St. Helena."

"It would be of imperial importance, Mr. Charlton," said Miss Travers, with a little smile. "And you," she added after he had laughed in sympathy, "do not intend to make the attempt to pass the scrutiny of Sir Ebenezer?"

"I certainly do," he replied. "To me that island beside us has a singular interest."

"What, you a Bonapartist—an Illegitimist? Why, I fancied that all young men nowadays were ardent Republicans—except, of course, those who have something to gain by being Monarchists or Imperialists."

"I assure you my interest in the place is quite personal," said he. "It is painfully personal, in fact, since it begins and ends with myself."

"You have invested the matter with such an air of mystery—of secrecy—that one longs to learn what is its origin. If you say that the reason of your interest in the island is a secret, my longing to penetrate it will be absolutely irresistible."

"There is not much of a secret about the matter, Miss Travers; and as for the mystery—well, I suppose that, as the matter has a distinct bearing upon what Southcote calls the phenomenon of love, we must, out of deference to his judgment, think of it in the light of a mystery."

"Deeper and deeper still," said Marian. "I am now almost afraid to ask you to reveal anything. I wish I were *well out of the business*. Never mind; I will only ask you

what the 'it' refers to, when you say that you must look at 'it' in the light of a mystery."

"I will tell you all, Miss Travers, as the women say in the melodramas when the author is anxious to have his last scene brought up to date. The 'it' refers simply to an incident that has always had a certain amount of interest for me—namely, the first meeting of my father and mother. It was, curiously enough, on one of these rocks that they met."

"How very interesting!"

"To me, yes; but to no one else in the world."

"Except the one to whom you are now talking. Think, if you were not holding me enthralled with your story I should be compelled to talk to—I mean, to listen to, Mr. Southcote. A conversation with Mr. Southcote is a monologue entertainment. Pray tell me all you know of that idyl of the island. Indeed I am interested in it."

"There is nothing more to be told. My father was a captain of artillery, my mother was the daughter of a general officer who had come to inspect or to do something in that way at the island. He was inspecting one day at a fort at the head of a cliff where there is a ladder—'Jacob's Ladder' Thomas Atkins has called it, with a stroke of that graceful fancy which he has at his command. Well, the general's daughter climbed up that ladder—it doesn't sound quite right, does it?—and at the top, where she expected to meet her father, she became enveloped in a mist. She wandered about for a while until she made up her mind that she had come upon the right track. She was walking briskly along—straight for the brink of the cliff; in two seconds she would have stepped into eternity. She didn't; she stepped into the arms of my father instead. He had also been lost in the mist, but having no father to look after he had wisely refrained from taking a step in any direction. That's the whole story. It has a suspicion of romance."

"Oh, you *have* not half told the story," cried Miss Travers.

"You have said nothing about the general's opposition to the suit of the penniless captain of artillery, who found it difficult to live within the limits of his pay—how the young couple stole aboard a steamer that carried a chaplain, and got married the day they left the island, and the irate father standing on a cliff shaking his fist at the smoke of the steamer that dwindled away in the distance."

"I have not your imagination, Miss Travers," said he. "The fact of the matter was that the general was a poor man and my father had some thousands a year besides his pay of eleven and eightpence a day. The marriage took place in England after the lapse of a year, and—well, here I am."

"And there," said Miss Travers as the steamer rounded a point—"there is Jacob's Ladder."

Charlton turned about—he had been standing with his back to the bulwarks—and saw on the starboard quarter of the steamer a precipitous cliff with a stairway built up its face and with a flagstaff at the summit. On the opposite side of the deep valley were equally precipitous cliffs, and in the far depths of the valley appeared the spire of a church. The tinkle of the engine room telegraph brought the propeller to a standstill. Then a seaman who was calling out the soundings was heard all over the vessel.

"Let go," sang out the captain, and the roar of the chain cable rushing out swallowed up all other words.

The *Carnarvon Castle* lay beneath the grim shadow of the island, rising and falling as the waves rushed under her keel and swirled about the blades of the motionless propeller.

"That is Jacob's Ladder indeed," said Charlton.

"It is Jacob's Ladder indeed," said Mr. Southcote, coming behind him. "But you will have difficulty in discovering the angels ascending and descending upon it."

"There are certainly no angels, so far as I can see," said Marian.

"No, just the opposite—soldiers," said Cyril,

CHAPTER VI.

ON AN OCEAN ISLAND.

AT the summit of the cliffs attained by that wooden stairway two persons were standing side by side looking out to that great, barren waste of waters of which the island seemed the center. In the little harbor that toy steamer of six thousand tons, the *Carnarvon Castle*, lay at anchor, surrounded by some chips of boats.

One of these two persons was Julian Charlton, the other was a girl whose name he had never heard, and whose face he had never seen except for the space of the last half hour.

She was young, and she seemed beautiful to Charlton when he had first seen her. Even after the lapse of half an hour she seemed beautiful to him.

The breeze which blows over some thousands of miles of the Atlantic Ocean to the summit of Ladder Hill, St. Helena, is so fresh that, when one has breathed its fullness for a few minutes, nothing in the world seems to be fresh in comparison. Even the sunset, which has usually a certain freshness about it, appears a bizarre and meretricious effect when viewed from this place.

And yet when Julian Charlton had swallowed more great draughts of the breeze, he looked at the girl's face and found it as sweet to look upon as it ever had been since it had first come upon his view half an hour before.

They were not exchanging a word. They were only standing side by side drinking in the breeze with the placid enjoyment of educated toppers.

"*It was worth coming for,*" said the girl at length as if she

were a connoisseur of air, pronouncing an opinion upon a special breeze that had been recommended to her for purity and body combined with bouquet. "Do you not think that it was worth coming for?" she inquired of her companion.

He turned from looking into the fresh breeze and looked into her fresh face.

"Yes," he replied. "I certainly do think that it was worth coming for."

"But there is nothing to see here," she cried. "They told us there was a splendid view from the summit. But there really is nothing to see here."

"Not out at sea, at any rate," said he.

"And certainly not in the scenery of these cliffs," she added. "There is not much here beyond what we call scrub in Australia."

"You have come from Australia, then," said he in a tone of inquiry.

"I was born there and I have never been away from it until now. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that; so far as I have seen of the world, we in Australia are quite in the front rank of civilization. My father was a convict."

She made the latter statement as if it were actually the strongest piece of evidence that could be brought forward in proof of the advanced position of civilization in Australia. Then she paused, apparently for him to make some reply.

He had no reply ready. Young men do not as a rule go about the world with an answer in readiness for such young ladies as announce that their fathers were convicts.

He did not even say "Indeed!" or "Poor old chap!"

At the same time he refrained from giving any start, or from manifesting any surprise, and in the exercise of such self-control he considered that he had done pretty well.

It was some time before it occurred to him that it would,

strictly speaking, have showed better taste on his part if he had expressed some little surprise at the young lady's announcement. It is, after all, not quite polite to say to a young lady who tells you that her father was a convict, "I'm not in the least surprised to hear it."

And yet if he had not actually said those words, he had at least implied them.

There was a little flush upon her face that was not exactly of the tint laid on so delicately by the breeze.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "It is absurd of me to talk to you in this way. What does it matter to you who my father was?"

"Nothing whatever," he replied. "It affects me in no way."

"I am glad of that. I did not mean to boast about my father."

Did she actually mean to imply that she believed a certain distinction was conferred upon a young woman who chanced to have a convict for a father? he wondered.

"I am just returning from visiting Australia," said he, with some anxiety to turn the conversation into another channel, "and I assure you that I was greatly impressed with all that I heard and saw. You have every reason to be proud of your country."

"But I'm not," she cried. "I hate it. The people have become civilized into narrow-mindedness. You carried your dress clothes about with you, I suppose."

"I admit that I did so, wherever it was practicable."

"Then you would get on all right. You should just see the way they look at a man who forgets to put on a dress coat when he is asked to quite a friendly little dinner."

"Why should they look at him so?"

"I don't know; I think they fancy he means to slight *them*. They are terribly suspicious that everyone they

meet wants to slight them. They have their own reasons for it."

"And yet you think Australia is in the front rank of civilized countries?"

"I was afraid you were going to abuse it. I don't like to hear strangers run it down."

"You allow no one to speak ill of it except yourself?"

"Exactly so. You see, I know all its strong points as well as its weaknesses. I have a right to speak. The people are narrow-minded and full of prejudices, and I'm glad that I'm going to England."

"Where you will find the parent stem from which all the branches and twigs and leaves of prejudice and narrow-mindedness have spread abroad even to Australia."

"What, you mean to tell me that people in England are narrow-minded?"

"I can assure you that you will find the parent stem a good deal thicker than any of the branches."

The girl looked at him steadily for a few moments. Then she gave a little scornful laugh.

"I'm fond of gardening," said she. "I'll find out all about that parent stem that you talk about. I thank you very much for having taken charge of me to the top of the ladder. I'll just run down the steps to poor Aunt Hannah."

"If you will allow me I will go down by your side," said he.

"But I thought you came up here for a purpose," remarked the girl.

"For a purpose?"

"I mean, I thought you were perhaps one of the soldiers—an officer—and that you were going to the fort up here."

"I am only a civilian," he replied. "But, to tell you the truth, *I did come for a purpose.*"

"Of course; so I can quite easily run down the steps alone."

"Pray do not do so for one moment," said the man. "I hope you will not think me impudent if I ask you to play a part in a little drama with me just at this place. Don't think me a lunatic escaped from my keeper when I ask you to be good enough to walk toward me when I stand just beside that pointed rock at the edge of the cliff."

"It sounds mysterious," said the girl. "But I don't believe that you are a lunatic, and I'll walk toward you—not close to the brink, however."

"Thank you," said he.

He went across the undulating ground covered with vegetation distinctly of the type 'scrub,' and soon reached a rock with a spire-like point at one end and an even surface resembling the seat of a chair at the opposite end. Here he stopped and raised his hand.

The girl, with a laugh, stepped out briskly to where he stood motionless.

She was tall and beautifully shaped, and she held her head high in the air as though she were listening for some voice to speak to her from above.

As she walked the strong breeze blowing from the sea forced her garments against her body and held them there until every delicate curve was suggested. It also loosened one of the strands of her hair and sent it flowing behind her.

He watched her.

A dozen steps brought her face to face with him.

She paused and looked up to his face, with a little flush on her own, and laughed as a child laughs in the middle of one of those formal games that children love.

"Well," she cried.

"Thank you," said he; "you gave me your hand when we were climbing the ladder—will you give it to me once again?"

"Certainly," she replied, putting her hand frankly into his. He held it for an instant with his eyes fixed gravely on her face. "And now," she added when he had dropped her hand, "you will, I am sure, tell me why you asked me to do all this. If you do not tell me I shall feel that I have been extremely silly. It is bad enough to be silly, but it is heartrending to feel that one has been silly."

"That is quite true," said he. "I do not think you have need to reproach yourself in this case. It was a curious fate that led me to this place, to this very spot, to this rock with its flat surface and its curious spire. I seem to have known it all my life, though I have never been here before. It would be interesting to know how much of his own recollections a father transmits to his son in the same way that he transmits, in the most friendly spirit—say, the gout or epilepsy."

"It would be extremely interesting," said she, "if the person who made the communication to you was not discursive, and inclined to stray from his text, otherwise——"

"I beg your pardon," said he. "It was at this very spot thirty-one years ago that a man stood, while a beautiful girl walked toward him just as you have done. That man was my father, and the girl became my mother. They had never seen one another previously. It was in a mist, and if she had not walked into his arms she should certainly have gone over the brink of the cliff. I heard the story when I was a boy, and I was anxious to realize the scene now that Fate had led me to this place."

"And have you succeeded in realizing it?"

"I have succeeded amply. I suppose it was part of the cunningly laid scheme of Fate that I should be given the means of realizing the scene that took place here so many years ago."

"You made a pilgrimage to this place, I suppose, in order to realize the scene."

"Not I. The steamer was on its way to England when the machinery broke down, two days ago, necessitating the captain's calling at St. Helena for repairs. Of course as the chance—as I called it—came to me, I took a boat ashore and—well, you know the rest."

She nodded, with her eyes looking, not as they had been, into his face, but out to where the sun was sinking into the sea, out of a cloudless sky.

"Fate," she said, as if she were communing with herself. "Fate." Then she looked at her companion. "It is very flattering to one's sense of one's own importance in the world—in the universe, I should say—to feel that there is a power that puts itself to a large amount of trouble to do one a good turn—or a bad turn, as the case may be. You call that power Fate, do you not?"

"Yes," said he. "I call everything that happens Fate. It saves one a lot of trouble."

"You are not so reverent as Count Cenci," said she; "he referred everything to Heaven."

"Count Cenci lived in an age when theology was an exact science," said he.

"And we are the subjects of the greatest Mohammedan state that has ever existed in the world," said she. "Suppose we descend to level ground again—in every sense. My aunt will think that she is being treated very badly. She will forget that it is Fate that is doing it all. She will only blame us. Such is the blindness of middle-aged persons who have attended Sunday school during the early years of their life, and class the Mohammedans among the heathen. My aunt remains on the plain, while we are on the heights."

"You are the most singular girl I have ever met," said *he*. "*What is your name?*"

"My name is Bertha Lancaster ; and yours?"

"Charlton—Julian Charlton. Now we are fairly on our way to a low level."

Almost in silence they descended that extraordinary stairway together. Before they had completed half their journey the sunset guns from the fort had sent the wild echoes flying from cliff to cliff. By the time they had reached the last steps the little town was wrapped in dimness. The lights of the shipping in the harbor were quivering over the waves.

On entering the hotel they were met by a rather stout, middle-aged lady wearing a bonnet, the strings of which were flying very wildly.

"You have been a long time, Bertha," said she ; "a long time. A steamer has called at the island, and I have secured berths for the voyage to England. Miriam and I have been packing for the past half hour. We must be aboard to-night, the agent says."

"What is the name of the steamer, aunt?" asked the girl.

"The *Carnarvon Castle*."

"Why, that is the steamer by which I am on my way to England," cried Charlton. "We shall be fellow-passengers."

There was undoubtedly a tone of exultation in the way he made this announcement.

The girl did not give any sign of joy, however. On the contrary, she turned pale and seemed distressed. There was a silence that lasted for close upon a minute. It was broken by a laugh from the girl—a little laugh with something of scorn in its ripples. When it had ended her face was not pale, but rosy.

Julian Charlton had an uneasy feeling that there was something of defiance in her laugh.

Who could it be—what could it be that she was defying?

There was perhaps this inquiry in the expression of his face, for she turned to him quickly, saying :

"Mr. Charlton, as it is decreed by—by my aunt, that we are to be companions for some time, I must confess that I led you astray in what I said about my father. It is quite true that he was an Australian convict; he was sentenced to twenty years' transportation for a forgery of which he was innocent. Six months after he arrived at the convict station they found the man who was really guilty and they gave my father a free pardon for the crime he had not committed, and a thousand pounds to compensate him. I assure you I have found that phrase, 'my father was a convict,' extremely useful in weeding out all false friends—especially in Australia."

"And you hoped to weed me out as well?"

"I have asked you to pardon me."

"I can do so with a clear conscience, not having been weeded out."

"Now we can plant our feet firmly on the ground," said she. "We are on a low level, not on the heights."

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE LIEBIG PRINCIPLE.

THE middle-aged lady with the flying bonnet-strings, that suggested earnest packing of trunks, had been found two hours before, sitting in a very forlorn attitude and breathing very hard, on one of the steps of Jacob's Ladder by Julian Charlton as he made the ascent. She had only mounted about sixty steps, but clearly that sixty had been enough for her. She looked very forlorn as she clutched the hand rail, and was quite oblivious to the fact that she was displaying an entire boot of a rather large size, with elastic sides considerably worn, and quite three inches of woollen stocking, resembling in its creases the folds of a fasting boa constrictor.

Mr. Charlton did not laugh when he came upon this picture. He raised his hat as he made the attempt to step over the prominent boot that rested on the plank of the stairway beneath that on which the lady was sitting.

She looked at him rather anxiously, and then glanced up the long slope of steps that suggested a drawing book illustration of the principles of perspective. Charlton could see in outline against the sky a figure that did not seem anything like so stout as the obstruction in front of him.

"Sir," sobbed the obstructive lady, and then continued sobbing for breath, until Mr. Charlton wondered how the hooks and eyes of her jacket could stand the strain. They were creaking audibly. "Sir." After a few minutes she was able to say a word or two—mostly monosyllables—and to let Mr. Charlton know that she and her niece had attempted the ascent of the ladder. "She said it would be

good fun," remarked the lady ruefully. "Maybe she found it so. I didn't. There she is up there, here am I where she left me to rest. I promised to follow her when I had rested. Sir, I will never follow her. Perhaps if you are going up you would be good enough to tell her that her aunt—I am her aunt, Mrs. Hardy is my name—will return to the hotel and wait for her there. Tell her to take great care how she comes back. It must be awful coming back. Maybe you would look after her, sir. She is a fatherless and motherless girl, and I am her aunt."

This list of the girl's misfortunes was plainly stated by the lady to inspire the pity of the stranger. The plan was a distinct success.

He looked at the aunt and had a profound pity for the niece.

He promised to convey the message, and he agreed to look after the niece.

He had looked after her—a long way—for the next twenty minutes. Then he found himself by her side at the summit of the ladder.

And now he was seated in the stern of a boat, steering for the anchor light of the *Carnarvon Castle*, with the aunt on one side of him and the niece on the other, a confused mass of trunks and portmanteaus lying in the bows.

On the way to the steamer Mrs. Hardy explained to Charlton that she and her niece were on their way to England, and that her niece was prolonging the voyage by visiting every place at which a steamer put in. They had been to Calcutta, Ceylon, Bombay, Natal, Cape Town, and lastly St. Helena. They had remained a week at almost every port. That was too short a time for most places, but too long for St. Helena, and they had agreed that it would be well to take their passages in the first steamer that might call at the island on the way to England.

She had just concluded the account of their itinerary

when the boat ran alongside the steamer, and Mr. Charlton hastened to help the lady, her niece, and their maid up the hand rail.

"Thank goodness! these are the last steps I'll see for some time, except the cabin stairs; and I'm not sorry for it; steps don't suit me, Mr. Charlton."

None of the passengers on the deck of the *Carnarvon Castle* had time to notice the arrival of the boat which Mr. Charlton had steered alongside. The fact was that Mrs. Howard had brought with her from the shore two officers of Engineers—one of them with his wife—and Captain Waring had also been accompanied by some members of the garrison of St. Helena, who had lost no time in making the acquaintance of all the passengers who wore frocks.

When a young man—or, for that matter, an old man—has been stationed for over a year—or, for that matter, over a month—at such a place as St. Helena, anything that wears a gown is welcomed by him with indiscriminate enthusiasm. If a young woman wishes to be appreciated to a point within measurable distance of what she conceives to be her own value, she should make a call at the island of St. Helena.

The occupants of the deck of the *Carnarvon Castle* were too deeply engrossed in their own affairs to have a moment to give to so ordinary an incident as the approach of another boat. They were standing and sitting and strolling about fore and aft in companies of two and three. Some were leaning together in places of fascinating gloom, watching the little waves climbing up the sides of the steamer. All were deeply engrossed in their own affairs.

"Love-making on the Liebig principle," said Cyril Southcote, waving his hand airily around as Charlton seated himself close to the hammock chair on which he *reposed, far enough aft to run no chance of being tripped*

over by any of the promenaders on the deck. "Love-making on the Liebig principle."

"The Liebig principle?"

"Yes—extraordinary compression. Half a dozen oxen boiled down into a half-pint jar—as much love-making as would do duty for six months compressed into half an hour—that's the Liebig principle."

Charlton laughed quietly and felt for his cigar case.

"You are, as usual, observing your fellow-creatures," he remarked as he seated himself on one of the fixed seats.

"They are entertaining, these fellow-creatures," said Cyril. "That group in the center is particularly entertaining. The youth in the mess jacket is a lieutenant of sappers. He has been trying to lure Miss Travers away from the side of Mrs. Howard, but he has made no progress as yet. He has just been assuring her that he knows of an extraordinary view of the rocks above the wharf that he can point out to her if she only steps forward with him. She told him that moonlight views made her feel melancholy—they always suggested to her a churchyard in a book of German prints. Then he offered to show her how phosphorescent the water is alongside the vessel. It was no use. She never could bear phosphorescent water, she declared—it put her in mind of Burne Jones and the Grosvenor Gallery, she said, by way of explanation. The sapper didn't seem satisfied."

"Odd that he wasn't satisfied."

"Isn't it? Then I have been noticing how the elderly Sapper has had his eye upon Miss Crawford, but his wife has her eye on him, and every time he has shown a tendency to steal away from the group, she has nipped it in the bud. Oh, they are all most entertaining to me! Why, if you only watch the skipper you will find the study to repay you. I heard him narrate in the most liberal spirit, to the *stout surgeon major* over there, the particulars of that *famous run he had* in Leicestershire. It actually appeared

to me that he fancied the surgeon major believed every word. I have often wondered if Ananias was a hunting man. Hallo! the central group is breaking up."

The engineer had just announced to the captain that the repairs to the faulty steam pipe were finished, and that steam was got up in the boilers. The watchful wife of the major of engineers was giving directions to have their boat brought up to the hand rail, and her husband was almost resigned to the dreary waste of a life of conjugal fidelity. He only glanced furtively every now and again at the attractive Miss Crawford, whose side he had made such persistent efforts to reach.

The lieutenant of engineers was beginning to regret that he had wasted his time with Miss Travers. His eyes sought out all the gloomy nooks about the deck houses and the bulwarks of the steamer, and, so far as he could judge, the other members of the garrison who had paid a visit to the *Carnarvon Castle* had not been losing their time. The sound of the getting up of steam allowed the sound of the low ripples of laughter that meant so much to the appreciative ears of the scientific officer, to broaden with impunity. He heard the sounds of this light-hearted and innocent mirth, and he had very bitter thoughts in his soul regarding Miss Travers. There was no innocent mirth about her. She was little better than a prude, he declared in his bitterness, for he was very angry and wished to think the worst of her. Another steamer was not due for ten days.

While Mrs. Howard was saying an affectionate farewell to the wife of the major, the major fancied he saw a favorable opportunity. He pretended that someone was calling him from the dark places under the bridge. He was hurrying in the most professional way into the darkness when his wife called to him in her strident tones:

"Algernon, come back at once. Do you hear me? Come back." Then turning to her friend, Mrs. Howard, she added in confidential tones: "Prevention is better than cure."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON SHADOWS.

THE *Carnarvon Castle* was once again under weigh. The last of the boats had been cast off, and the mirthful young ladies, who had been watching the phosphorescent waters so kindly pointed out to them by their visitors from the island—they had qualified for the arduous duty by a residence of considerable duration ashore—were feeling almost sad.

The moonlight was quivering over the white swirling waters in the wake of the steamer, and smiting the face of the cliffs with its silver lances. Julian Charlton stood with his eyes fixed upon that dark line that marked the course of Jacob's Ladder up to the summit.

He wondered if he had ever dreamt that he had been standing one evening upon the uneven ground at the summit of the cliffs, with a figure who had been in his dreams for years by his side.

Then the steamer's course was altered, and Ladder Hill was slowly slipping into the shadow of the headland round which the steamer was passing.

It was gone, and he was feeling more strongly than before that he had had a dream of being at the summit with the mist-like form of many a dream by his side.

He turned away from the barren island with something like a sigh. A figure was standing behind him—the pleasant, but, in the engineer lieutenant's eyes, not sufficiently plastic, figure of Marian Travers.

"We had a delightful run ashore," said she. "We paid a visit to Mr. Southcote's old friend, Sir Ebenezer. A

delightful old gentleman he is. Anything more cruel than Mr. Southcote's treatment of so inoffensive a person I cannot imagine. I don't know how he had the heart to do it. It was as bad as taking advantage of a child. I have seen some guileless administrators, but none that could approach Sir Ebenezer."

"Did he write his name in your birthday book, Miss Travers, or give you a cabinet portrait of himself in the character of Wordsworth's *Father William*?"

"I will not listen to your scoffing, Mr. Charlton. Sir Ebenezer is my ideal of a graceful old gentleman. He is a most graceful administrator. He plays the zither very prettily."

"Then I gather that we need not be apprehensive of a revolutionary outbreak at St. Helena just yet?"

"I believe that the people worship him. His speech at the opening of a bazaar at James' Town is being published in pamphlet form. It is expected to have a great influence upon the course of modern thought. He assured us that it was entirely non-political. There was not a word in it that any foreign power could take exception to. He colors photographs very nicely, and his collection of ferns is one of the largest in the island."

"His is indeed a notable career. Has he no vices to give him an interest in life?"

"He plays bézique."

"That is the little leaven. Sir Ebenezer is human, after all."

"And you, Mr. Charlton," resumed Miss Travers; "did you carry out your ideas of a pilgrimage?"

"I went up the ladder, Miss Travers."

"And you stood at the summit, where that scene about which you were telling me was enacted—how many years ago?"

"Thirty-one years ago. Yes, I stood there."

"How interesting! I can easily fancy the vision that came before your eyes."

She was speaking seriously. He could perceive that she was really interested in what he had told her regarding the meeting of his father and mother.

"Yes," she continued after a little pause which he did not think necessary to break. "Yes, you stood there at the brink of the cliff, and you saw coming toward you a beautiful girl—her face flushed with the exertion of climbing, and her fair hair flying about her shapely head, as the breeze from the ocean ran the tender fingers of a mother through those loose tresses."

"Good God!" cried Charlton, starting from the bulwarks against which he had been leaning, and staring at Marian Travers. He recovered himself in an instant, and gave a laugh. He wondered if the amiable Sir Ebenezer added a little astronomy to his other blameless accomplishments—if he possessed a trustworthy telescope, by the aid of which the summit of Ladder Hill might be made visible from Government House. He had heard of the imagination of young women being stimulated by the aid of applied science.

"Pray go on, Miss Travers," he said. "Pray tell me all that I saw at the summit of the hill. I should like to be provided with a complete list."

"If you did not see all that I have told you of, you must have a singularly weak imagination," said Miss Travers. "I cannot understand why young men who chance to be Englishmen should be ashamed to acknowledge that they have brains or imagination."

"I cannot understand it any more than yourself, Miss Travers; but whether we understand it or not, they are," said Charlton.

"Now, do you mean to tell me that you went up to that place, where your father and your mother met in so roman-

tic a way, and yet failed to see before you the picture which I had barely outlined when you interrupted me with that irreverent exclamation?"

"I mean to tell you nothing of the sort, Miss Travers. I mean to admit that I saw before me exactly such a figure as your words suggested."

"Oh, you admit it," cried the girl triumphantly. "My imagination—such as it is—did not mislead me. You saw the beautiful picture that was seen by your father so many years ago?"

"My father saw nothing," said Charlton. "He could not see a yard ahead of him on account of the mist."

"I quite forgot the mist," said Miss Travers in a tone of despondency. "It does not matter," she added after a pause. "We can say that so strong was his presentiment of his coming fate that he pictured the figure coming toward him."

"And I," said Charlton gravely, "I had no presentiment."

"Presentiment? Of what?" cried the girl.

"Of my—what did you say just now?—Fate—that was your word."

"Not your fate, your father's fate—to meet on the summit of that hill the girl who was afterward to be part of his life—that was his fate, not yours."

"You cannot give me a word of hope, Miss Travers?"

Miss Travers gave a little flush—it was not visible in the moonlight.

"Hope," she said in a very low tone. "You ask me for a word of hope?"

"You were good enough to draw a picture of a figure which you say I saw at the summit of that hill. You told me it was a beautiful girl. Is she ever to remain on the heights, while I walk alone through the lower tracks of the earth beneath?"

"Ah," said Miss Travers in a tone that seemed like the expression of a sigh. "Ah, she was a shadow. Do you ask me to give you some hope that a shadow shall become part of your life?"

"Is she nothing more than a shadow?"

"She is the embodiment of the mist in which people are occasionally lost on those heights."

"And yet happiness came out of that mist into my father's arms."

"Oh, Mr. Charlton," cried the girl at length, "do not take things so seriously, I entreat you. I withdraw that shadow from your life which I said you had seen up there. I will be as definite as a hypnotizer, and you must be as docile as his subject; I now tell you that you saw no shadow on the heights; you must agree with me fully, if you are to play the part of the subject gracefully."

"I am only too happy to agree with you, Miss Travers: I saw no shadow."

"Then I further command you not to speak in so lugubrious a tone of voice. Don't think of the shadow on the heights, but of the flesh and blood on the lower and more level lands. I speak as a hypnotizer."

"Alas! Alas!" said he. "The shadows are more real than the substance. The shadows appear in the mist, and one breathes the mist until the shadows become part of one's life."

"More parables?"

"A parable is the shadowed image cast by the substance truth."

"As saith the copy books," remarked Mr. Southcote, who had come up behind the two figures standing at the bulwarks gazing at the two highest hills of the island—Lot and Lot's Wife. "How have you fallen to so low a depth as that in which the ethical buds bloom among the leaves of the copy book?"

"I believe that Mr. Charlton has found the Jacob's Ladder of St. Helena as mysterious as the original seen by the patriarch," said Miss Travers. "He has breathed the ambrosial atmosphere at the summit, and he cannot bring himself to partake of the ordinary fare of earth."

"I found him very ordinary when I was talking to him just now," said Southcote. "He is not too bright and good for human nature's daily food—when conscientiously cooked."

"Or human nature's nightly drink," said Captain Waring. "What do you say to a split soda, Charlton, old man, to be followed by a quiet little poker?"

"Southcote will split with you," said Charlton. "As for the poker—well, I'll not play to-night."

"I don't see why the deuce a fellow shouldn't have a friendly game after a few hours ashore as well as on any other night," said Waring. "It's not so much of a place after all—that lump of rock over there," and he steadied himself against a stay with his left hand, while he pointed out with his right, somewhat dreamily, the exact place to which he was alluding, lest his friends might make any mistake. "What's Saint 'Lena that it should knock a fellow off a poker? Hanged if there aren't friends of mine that have bigger rockeries in their back gardens than the whole fixture over there—there."

This time he steadied himself with his right hand and endeavored to take a perfect aim with his left at the island, for he seemed greatly afraid that his friends might take up his meaning wrongly and fancy that he was casting a slight upon quite another part of the world. His attempt to point out the island was not quite successful. "'Scuse me, Miss Travers, but this beast of a boat is jerky—if the skipper would only run up a trys'l to steady her I'd point you out the place I mean. Anyhow, I bear no malice, so go'-night."

He felt his way along the deck very cautiously for a few steps, then he returned to the group.

"On secon' thoughts," he murmured, "I'll not split the soda ; I'll drink it all. Go'-night, Miss Travers. I knew your father well. Gawbless you ! I'll point you out the island in the morning."

Miss Travers, as she lay in her berth that night, began to try to account for the undoubted change that had taken place in Mr. Charlton's manner between the time of his leaving for the island and his reappearance upon the deck of the *Carnarvon Castle*. She felt that he had been more than interested in her when they had had their long rides together at the Cape, and she believed that the week they had passed aboard the steamer had strengthened his regard for her. She had actually made a rough, perhaps an unconscious, calculation that should this process of consolidation be maintained for the remainder of the voyage, he would probably propose to her before the Bay of Biscay would be reached.

She rather hoped that he would do so before they reached the Bay of Biscay. She had had some experience of the bay, and she had no confidence in the possibility of any man's determination surviving the passage of the Bay of Biscay. A man has no stomach for love making, or, indeed, for anything else except pale brandy and captain's biscuits, from the time the vessel passes the latitude of Gibraltar until the English Channel is reached.

But since Mr. Charlton had gone ashore, returning to the steamer unobserved by anyone aboard, he had suffered a change. She could apprehend the change, though she could not define it—definitions are coarse, rough and ready methods of making certain matters plain to the commonplace understanding. There are some people who are so constituted as to be unable to perceive a want of cordiality *on the part of a man* unless he swears at them.

Marian Travers was not one of those people. Mr. Charlton had been quite as cordial in speaking to her after the last of the visitors had left the ship's side and the moonlit rocks of the island were becoming more indistinct every moment as he had been in the morning. And yet she felt that a change had passed over him.

Could it be, she wondered, that he had seen that young officer of engineers by her side? Could it be that he fancied that she was devoting herself to that young man, after the fashion of the greater number of the girls on the same deck in regard to the other young men, who were paid for maintaining St. Helena as a British dependency in the face of the other Powers that are consumed with jealousy at our good fortune in possessing such a treasure?

Could it be that Charlton was actually jealous of the sapper?

She rather hoped that it was a case of pique. It would, indeed, be a healthy sign if he were actually piqued on account of the officer's attentions.

She began to feel really happy, as any good girl would, as she became impressed with the idea that, after all, nothing but jealousy was the matter with Charlton. She had not lived very long in the world, but there are some great truths that are apprehended without the aid of a vast or varied experience. One of these—perhaps not the greatest, but still an eminently useful one—is that the course of true love is marvelously accelerated by the introduction of a little jealousy.

She knew that there is nothing so bad for a husband or so good for a lover as a little jealousy. It acts upon lovers as mulching acts upon roses—it brings them on.

She went to sleep, being almost satisfied that the change which she had noticed in Charlton was only the result of a little *healthy jealousy*.

For if the feelings of women are rarely astray, their judgments are frequently awry. Marian Travers felt that Charlton had changed. Here she was right. She judged that the origin of this change was jealousy. Here she was wrong.

As for Charlton himself, he went to sleep filled with longing for the morrow.

CHAPTER IX.

ON A DECK CHAIR.

IT was the habit of some of the passengers aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* to take a stroll on deck every morning before sitting down to breakfast. Most of them did no more than lounge about the wheel. Others were determined to carry out a fell scheme of walking two miles every morning, calculated by a tape measure on the promenade deck of the steamer.

Mr. Charlton was one of the passengers who had never been known to appear five minutes before the ringing of the breakfast bell. Miss Travers was one who had never been known to miss a ten minutes' stroll, whatever the weather might be.

When Miss Travers passed out of the deck house this morning and reached the deck, she was unconscious of the grateful breeze that came upon her face. She was unconscious of everything about her save that Julian Charlton was seated on one of the ship's carpet stools, face to face with a young girl, who occupied Charlton's own hammock chair, and with a middle-aged lady, inclined to be stout, who occupied a stronger seat—one that had clearly been designed to afford repose without risk to a person above the average weight.

Mr. Charlton was engaged in conversation with the younger lady, and his cheeks as well as hers were glowing with animation.

He had never been on deck before breakfast since leaving *Table Bay*.

He had never unfolded his chair for the accommodation of a fellow-passenger since leaving Table Bay.

The girl was extremely pretty.

The thoughts of Miss Travers had this sequence as she stood at the door of the deck house ; and as her thoughts came, her heart stood still.

Where on earth had they come from ? She had heard of persons being picked off rafts by steamers after undergoing terrible hardships : had these strangers come aboard the steamer in this wise ?

They did not look like it. The elder lady did not look in the least like a person who had been rescued at the last moment from the results of a protracted *régime* of starvation. The younger had a bright complexion, and her lips were like red coral. Her dress fitted her to perfection.

That was the worst of it.

Where on earth had they come from ?

It did not take Marian Travers long to see all that was to be seen of this strange occurrence, and to ask herself every question possible to be asked regarding the mysterious appearance of the two ladies—one of them in the chair which Julian Charlton cherished for his own accommodation. Curiously enough, all her observations and reflections were crystallized into the one thought—the girl's dress fitted her to perfection.

The result of that one thought was not to impart artistic gratification to Marian Travers' bosom.

And it was only the previous night that she had felt gratified at the reflection that Julian Charlton was becoming jealous !

She took a few steps down the deck away from where the group were sitting. A voice sounded behind her—the voice of Captain Waring.

"Miss Travers," said the voice, "may I ask you as a friend to tell me if I was very drunk last night ?"

“Certainly you were not, Captain Waring—not very,” she replied without hesitation.

“Thank you,” said he politely. “It was my own impression that I wasn’t so sober as to cause people to make remarks about it; at the same time I felt that I wasn’t uninterestingly drunk. Then will you tell me how I came to miss seeing that?” and he pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the group of three which had so surprised Miss Travers—a group of four it might more appropriately be termed, for the boot of the elder lady, which forced itself into prominence, might claim to be regarded as a distinct entity, not susceptible of being absorbed into its own surroundings.

“Do not blame yourself, Captain Waring,” said Marian. “I assure you that our new passengers came aboard without my having the slightest knowledge of the fact. I never was so surprised as when I came on deck just now and saw them sitting there.”

“But think what it was to me, Miss Travers, when I saw them come out of that door a quarter of an hour ago, followed by one of the boys with the deck chair, which the mother—she looks motherly—so ably fills. It has the build of a weight-carrier, that chair. I was staggered, I can tell you—I felt that it would have been no surprise to me if I had found myself remonstrating with one of the life-boats for following me about the deck. I felt that I must be breaking up quicker than ordinary, especially as Charlton hastened to meet them and greet them as if he had known them all his life—the young one in particular. Yes, I felt that I was only separated by a thin line from the black cat stage—I give you my word I felt that I would be seeing the black cat next.”

“I dare say Mr. Charlton met them in the course of his travels,” said Marian; “and when he found them at *St. Helena* he renewed their acquaintance.”

"And perhaps persuaded them that this tub is far and away ahead of all the *Castles* that sail the seas, so that they couldn't do better than take berths aboard. Just like what Charlton would do. Look at the young one."

Miss Travers glanced in the direction of Bertha, and she could scarcely fail to agree with Captain Waring that if Mr. Charlton had used whatever power of persuasion he had at his command to induce the two strangers to join the ship's company of the *Carnarvon Castle*, such a course would by no means be inconsistent with human nature.

This was not exactly how Waring had put it ; but it was probably what he meant.

"Mr. Charlton brought them aboard last night," whispered someone who had just come on deck behind Waring and Miss Travers. The new arrival was Miss Crawford, the very attractive young person whose side the major of engineers had exhausted all his knowledge of modern strategy to reach. She was the daughter of Mr. Lionel Crawford. He was a literary gentleman who had been for some time engaged upon his *magnum opus*, which it was understood took the form of a political key to "Alice in Wonderland." He had been ordered a long voyage for the benefit of his health, which had naturally suffered through the undue application to his desk entailed by the conscientious discharge of his self-imposed task. "Yes, he brought them aboard last night. I found out all about them from Mrs. Robinson." Mrs. Robinson was the stewardess, and she was generally found to know all about everyone. "They are Australians ; the stout one is Mrs. Hardy, the other one is a Miss Lancaster. They have a maid ; her name is Miriam. 'Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea !' "

"Where's the maid ?" asked Captain Waring, for whom the first chord of interest had been struck. "Where's the maid ?"

"How should I know, Captain Waring?" said Miss Crawford stiffly. "I don't think her so very pretty."

"Who—the maid?" inquired Waring.

Miss Crawford took no notice of the inquiry.

"Do you think her so very pretty, Marian?" she asked of Miss Travers.

"Extremely," replied Miss Travers quickly, though she had by no means made up her mind on the subject.

"*It cannot really have been a case between her and Charlton, or she would be down on the new girl,*" thought the artless Captain Waring.

"*Marian Travers is a clever young woman,*" thought the far from artless Miss Crawford.

And there sat Julian Charlton on the uncomfortable carpet stool, engrossed in conversation with that hatefully pretty girl who lay back in a shockingly graceful way in Charlton's own chair. No one in the group gave the least attention to any of the other passengers. They seemed altogether independent of their human surroundings.

A condition which was very exasperating to some of these surroundings.

Then the bell rang for breakfast, and at the first sound the young woman leaped to her feet out of Charlton's chair in a way that plainly suggested a good appetite.

The excellence of the aunt's appetite was suggested by the tardiness of her movement.

So soon as the aunt and the niece were on their way to the companion, Charlton quietly picked up the book which Bertha Lancaster had allowed to slip to the deck from her knee. She had brought out the book with her from the cabin, but circumstances had prevented her from reading it. Charlton, after picking it up, laid it gently, almost reverently, down upon his own chair that the girl had occupied.

Marian Travers saw the act.

It suggested to her his desire to appropriate the girl who had last sat in the chair.

If so sensible a young woman as Miss Travers had only reflected for a moment she could not have failed to perceive the extraordinary weakness of the chain of reasoning which led her to accept the act as indicative of such an intention on the part of Julian Charlton.

He had only desired that the girl should appropriate the chair. Surely this was not equivalent to the suggestion of a desire to appropriate the girl.

But then Miss Travers did not reflect. Women do not reflect—they feel. This is why many tears are shed.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE HUMAN SOUL.

NOT until everyone had been seated for some time at the tables in the saloon of the *Carnarvon Castle*, and the Dutch clergyman, who was among the passengers, had said grace in French—not because that language is generally regarded as the mother tongue of theology, but because his English was ridiculous, and because the majority of the Englishmen whom he had met regarded Cape Dutch as the mother tongue of Beelzebub, and only adapted to such theological expressions as are essential to a malediction—not until the curried oysters had almost all been appropriated, did Mr. Charlton descend and hasten up to the side of the table at which he was accustomed to sit.

If he had been a designing man, Cyril Southcote thought, he would certainly have been on the spot in order to make provision for obtaining a seat next the very pretty girl who had been sitting in his deck chair.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to sit a little further down the table, Mr. Charlton," said the chief steward, following him up the saloon.

"Eh, what do you say, Robinson?" said he. "A change in seats? Oh, yes, to be sure. Well, where are you going to put me, Robinson?"

"Here, sir," said the steward, twisting round one of the chairs for Charlton's accommodation. "If you had been here sooner, sir, I would have asked you if you minded the change."

"All right, Robinson; don't make a fuss," said Charlton.

"I place myself unreservedly in your hands. Is this the seat?"

"If you please, sir."

It may possibly have caused some pleasing emotion to Mr. Charlton to discover, as he did with a little gesture of surprise, so soon as he had seated himself, that the passenger on his right was Miss Lancaster.

"That trick cost him just a sovereign," murmured Captain Waring, who had paused in the midst of his crayfish to watch the transaction.

He was wrong.

It was only half a sovereign that the adroit Mr. Charlton had placed in the reluctant hand of the chief steward early in the morning, with a hint that if it could be made quite consistent with the etiquette of the saloon—a branch of knowledge of which the steward was master—to allow him to sit next to the young lady whom he had brought aboard the previous evening, he should not feel greatly mortified.

The chief steward said he would see what could be done in the matter, and the result of his consideration was made plain when Miss Travers had seated herself. The chair next to her had hitherto been occupied by Charlton; but now the chief steward bowed Mrs. Hardy into it, and then bowed Miss Lancaster into the next. The new arrivals having been accommodated it only remained for the steward to beg, in that apologetic tone which he had assumed, that Mr. Charlton would have the kindness to take the chair furthest down the table. This kindness Mr. Charlton had at his command; and the general impression which prevailed—for some moments—among the passengers on the opposite side of the table was that Mr. Charlton was quite too easily imposed upon by the officials of the saloon.

Captain Waring flattered himself that he knew better.

And the market value of the transaction he had roughly estimated at one sovereign.

Mr. Cyril Southcote sat a considerable way up the table. It has been stated that, on Charlton's appearing in the saloon after the other passengers were seated, Cyril Southcote had regarded him as the most guileless of men. In the course of the next five minutes he considered that he had good reason for revising his impression of Charlton. He regarded him as the most fortunate of men ; and being well aware that good fortune and guilelessness are rarely found in association, he had had no difficulty in pronouncing Charlton extremely adroit—so adroit as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect.

Southcote considered himself the very elect.

As for Julian Charlton, he did not venture to glance down the table—not even as far down as three seats to his right, where Marian Travers was sitting—with a view of discovering what was the prevailing expression in the faces of the passengers when they perceived that he had changed—had been, as he put it, forced out of his accustomed place. He quietly explained to his neighbor, Miss Lancaster, that the laws of the Medes and Persians might be considered types of mutability compared with the cabin code of the *Carnarvon Castle*. The places at the tables were allotted strictly in the order of the booking of the passengers, he explained, so that she and her aunt would naturally have found themselves at the foot of the table if Robinson, the chief steward, had not taken upon him to assume that he, Charlton, would not object to be moved down to the last place.

"It is not a position of indignity, that at the foot of the table, is it, Mr. Charlton ? so that you really need not have been moved. Neither my aunt nor I would have objected in the least to the seat you are in."

"Of course not," said he. "But, as no doubt you have noticed *aboard the P. and O. steamers* when on your way

to Calcutta, it is usually the case that a man is made a sort of tailpiece at either side of the tables. In any case," he added, "it is just as well that Robinson should have a free hand in these matters, and he has very wisely placed Mrs. Hardy by the side of Miss Travers. Mrs. Hardy and Miss Travers are certain to get on well together; and as for you and me——"

"I am certain that we will get on splendidly," said the girl, with the most innocent laugh that he had ever heard.

"I hope so, with all my heart," said he.

"You may depend upon it," she cried with enthusiasm. "We both eat like children, I see, and not in accordance with any fixed principle, such as grown people love to lay down for their guidance, in order that they may feel that satisfaction which comes from going contrary to any fixed principle. For my part, I am always hungry. It's part of my nature, I suppose."

"I am not so sure that an evolutionist of any standing in his profession would allow your theory of hereditary hunger to pass unchallenged," said Charlton.

"But when they tell you that the perpetual thirst which is enjoyed by so many persons is inherited from their fathers, and passed down through a long line of steady drinkers, why may we not say that my perpetual hunger was born with me?"

"Why not indeed?" said Charlton. "And therefore we'll get on well together? That is how you commenced."

"Of course. We have something in common. Persons who drink a good deal get on well together—at least until they quarrel."

"And so shall we—at least until we quarrel. But at the same time, Miss Lancaster, I would fain hope that we have other sympathies in common—other aspirations, *rather more spiritual*."

"Spiritual aspiration and spiritual sympathy," said the girl, "imply the existence and presence of a soul—of two souls."

"I am willing to admit one, for the sake of argument," said Charlton.

"But you are a man of science, and therefore you think that all knowledge of this sort is negative?"

"I am a man of science, and therefore I say that such knowledge is positive," said Charlton.

"What, you mean to tell me that there are any people in England at present who believe that a scrap of soul remains among human beings?"

"There are thousands who are assured of it, Miss Lancaster. There are even some here and there who believe in the human soul, not merely as a subject eminently adapted to co-operative divisibility—one doing duty for a number of persons—but actually as an individual possession."

"Then will you tell me if it is England or Australia that is behind in science?" cried the girl.

"I cannot say," said Charlton; "I know that the prevailing feeling in England just now is not that the regeneration of mankind has the best chance of being effected through the agency of sulphate of copper and zinc filings. Is there any science in Australia?"

"There is nothing but science, Mr. Charlton," said Bertha. "There is nothing but science to be met with in any direction. I have come to hate the idea of a man with a mind. Does a man's sympathy come from his mind? They have told me long ago that sympathy is only a form of reasoning."

"And no doubt that gratitude is the same—that it springs only when one expects that one will have further cause for its exercise."

"*The laboratory is the modern temple,*" said the girl.

"It is there that the man of science goes to worship, not with his soul, but with his mind. He puts the human soul into the crucible, and gives you an analysis of what remains, worked out to five places of decimals. He has brought God into the laboratory, and after a series of experiments declared him to be two parts superstition and one part automatic cerebration. Science has taken from us all that made life beautiful, and has given us in exchange a handful of ashes and a mathematical formula."

"I am amazed to hear you say that, Miss Lancaster," said Charlton ; and he really was amazed.

"Of course, as a man of science, you are amazed to find anyone with the effrontery to say a word against your modern systems."

"I am," he replied ; "I am amazed to find anyone with the courage to express what I have felt for years."

"What, you do not mean to say that you have been thinking on the same lines?" cried the girl.

"I assure you I have," said he. "I left Cambridge full of scientific enthusiasm—I worked for five years in accordance with modern methods. The deeper the insight I got into the most recent systems, the more dissatisfied I became. One morning the breaking strain was reached. I packed up my portmanteau and took the first steamer to America. That is nearly two years ago, and I have been traveling ever since."

"And the result has been?"

"The result has been that—that—I met you."

The girl did not look down to her plate with a blush as she would have done had she lived fifty years earlier. She turned her eyes full upon his face. She looked at him earnestly, with something of wonder in her gaze. He felt as though the most brilliant electric search light had been directed upon him, only no electric search light has been invented that will reach to a man's soul.

He met her gaze frankly. He made no attempt to avoid it. He felt that he had incurred a responsibility by making use of the words, and he would not evade it.

"I think," said the girl, "I think that——" Her eyes left his face and settled upon something else. "I think that I should like some of that marmalade, Mr. Charlton."

He passed her the glass plate.

He felt that she could not have said anything more suitable to the requirements of the situation of the moment.

He had known her fifteen hours—eight of which he had passed in slumber—and he had just assured her that the result of his two years of travel was his meeting with her.

What was left for her but to express a desire to try some marmalade?

CHAPTER XI.

ON LEADING A HORSE TO THE WATER.

WHILE Charlton and Bertha were engaged in their interesting conversation, Mrs. Hardy was getting on friendly terms with Marian Travers. The elder lady possessed the invaluable faculty of getting on friendly terms with most people—even young ladies, who, with all the insolence of slimness, called her stout.

Marian Travers had no objection in the world to be made acquainted with the chief incidents in the life of Mrs. Hardy and of her niece during the past year or two. She learned that Mrs. Hardy, on the death of her brother, Mr. Lancaster, two years before, had gone out from England to Australia to take charge of Mr. Lancaster's only child—the girl who was engaged in conversation with Mr. Charlton. She also learned that taking charge of Mr. Lancaster's only child had been something of a care to her aunt. Just as her aunt had become reconciled to life in Australia, the girl had made up her mind to travel to England by easy stages, but they did not seem easy to the aunt. A month or two in Calcutta had seemed to the niece essential for the study of the elements of Buddhism. But a knowledge of the elements of Buddhism did not apparently enter into the aunt's ideas of how to make life agreeable, though it seemed that the niece found unbearable the prospect of existence without an intimate acquaintance with Buddhism. From Calcutta to Ceylon for further studies in what the aunt considered mysticism, and from Ceylon to Bombay to take a passing glance to find out if there was anything in *Mohammedanism*, and from Bombay to the Cape colonies to

discover if the people there were broader in their views than the inhabitants of the Australian cities—this itinerary had had a great charm for the niece, but the aunt, in briefly reviewing the situation for the benefit of Miss Travers, declared that it had been a great weariness to herself.

"I look forward to settling down in England," said Mrs. Hardy. "I made up my mind when I sat down on that awful ladder last evening that nothing would induce me to give way upon another occasion to my niece's thirst for knowledge. She had heard of that Jacob's Ladder, and the name had fascinated her. She laughed when she asked me one day if it might not be possible that heaven was at the top of that ladder—the same as the original ladder in the Bible. I told her, of course, not to be irreverent; but she kept on referring to that ladder and saying that she had found out what it meant."

"How interesting!" said Miss Travers. "And what did it mean?"

"I really could scarcely tell you," replied Mrs. Hardy. "It was somehow connected with what she called the mystery of the sea. The mystery of the sea and the mystery of human life were the same, she said; and if one wished to find out all about the one it would be necessary to give all one's attention to the other."

"How interesting!" said Miss Travers once again. "And so you both went up the ladder?"

"Not both," said Mrs. Hardy. "She went on to find her heaven at the top. I remained about fifty steps from the bottom. I found that if I had to climb to heaven by means of steps I should have to content myself with earth. Steps are becoming more trying to me every year."

"But your niece went on to the top?"

"She did indeed—every step."

"And did she find her heaven?"

"*She found a man.*"

"Oh, you do not suggest that that was the same thing?"

"The same thing? I said she found a man—oh, of course, I see what you mean now. It was Mr. Charlton whom she met. He overtook me where I was resting, and I begged him to tell Bertha that I would return to the hotel when I recovered sufficient breath to go down. He went up that ladder like a—no, monkey isn't the word—he went up, at any rate, as if he had spent some years of his life doing nothing but going up ladders. He was very civil, and when he heard that we were going to England by this steamer he insisted on bringing us aboard. Now I wonder if I dare take any of that marmalade. Is there much sugar in marmalade—much flesh-forming elements? I am on a *régime*, and the result is that I daren't touch anything without full inquiries as to its properties. I want something that isn't flesh-forming."

Miss Travers said she was sure that marmalade was quite harmless, and then she sat silent, lost in thought.

She had now learnt all that there was to learn regarding the matter that had been a mystery to her. Mr. Charlton and that girl, whose name she had just heard was Bertha Lancaster, had met at the summit of Ladder Hill. She had gone up the face of that cliff with a curious feeling that at the summit she should discover the greatest felicity that the soul of man can conceive of. He had gone up with his heart full of that scene which had taken place at the summit of the cliff thirty-one years before—a scene to which he might even say he owed his very existence.

Under such circumstances how could it be expected that they should refrain from fancying that their strange meeting was the result of the operations of a benevolent Providence to bring them together?

Marian Travers now knew the reason for the change which, in her sympathetic frame of mind, she had noticed in *Julian Charlton*. She had fancied that this change

had been due only to a certain jealousy—healthy jealousy, she had even called it, as she lay awake thinking over it.

Oh, fool !

And what had she done the previous evening? She had actually, in a light-hearted way, made a jest about his pilgrimage to that hill. She had actually assured him that she knew what vision it was that had come before his eyes at the summit of Ladder Hill. She had drawn a picture of a beautiful girl out of her own imagination, declaring, with a laugh, that such a girl had come toward him on the hilltop—such a girl! She looked at Bertha, and she knew that the girl she had pictured was not nearly so beautiful as the real girl who had walked toward Charlton.

Now she knew what he had meant by his strange words—they had seemed mysterious to her the previous evening—there was not much of mystery about them now. What was left for her to do? she asked herself, as she stood alone in the middle of her cabin, whither she had retired to get her novel after breakfast.

What was left for her to do?

She heard the joyous laughter of Bertha as Charlton made some remark to her in a low tone as they went toward the companion together.

What was left for her to do?

It has always been a difficult problem. What should a young woman do when her lover becomes somebody else's lover?

Much sound advice has been given to the young woman who has been left alone. She has been assured that the proper thing for her to do is to rejoice greatly, inasmuch as the lover who allows himself to be tempted away, is no true lover, but just the opposite. A lover who gives promise of a plentiful harvest of inconstancy should be got rid of—*so much is certain.*

If the young woman could only be brought to think so.

But she never can. The young woman thinks that a lover with a tendency to inconstancy is better than no lover at all.

She is deeply wounded when he is inconstant, because she knows that people will say she was neither clever enough nor beautiful enough to keep him constant to her.

But the worst feature of Miss Travers' case was that her lover had not declared himself to be such. The one man who leads the horse to the water, with infinite tact, giving it to understand how delightful a draught of that cool element will be, must certainly attract to himself a good deal of sympathy when the stubborn brute refuses to drink, and resists the efforts of the nineteen assistants whose services the man requisitions to make the horse drink.

Mr. Charlton was being coaxed up to the brink of love-making, and he not only refused to take the smallest sip out of the magic chalice, but he had actually broken the silken cord with which he was being led to the fascinating draught, and had raced off with his head in the air to where a very ordinary cup was being offered to him.

Who has laid down any rule for the guidance of a young woman under circumstances such as these?

Marian Travers was a sensible girl. She resolved to do nothing—just yet.

She knew that the worst way to go about making a horse drink the water that it has refused is to run after it. She resolved not to run after her horse. She had heard of silken cords having been broken, and afterward re-joined with such adroitness that no one could tell where the severance had taken place.

She felt herself equal to the task of reuniting the several

parts of the silken cord with which she had endeavored to draw Mr. Charlton in the direction of the sweetest draught that ever human lips—grew weary of.

She found her novel, saw that her hair was sufficiently untidy to be in keeping with tradition, and went smiling up the steps of the companion.

“Things are not so bad with her but that she can still smile,” said Captain Waring as he watched her go to her deck chair, saying a friendly word to Charlie Barham as she passed, for everyone liked Charlie.

“Things are very bad with her indeed when she finds it necessary to smile like that,” said the fascinating Miss Crawford to herself, as she also watched Marian Travers.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE VORACITY OF THE SHARK.

MR. JULIAN CHARLTON was no fool—that is to say, he was no greater fool than any other person of his sex becomes when a girl appears before his eyes. He did not hasten to seat himself beside Bertha on the deck. He knew that she would find the novel which she had been reading on his deck chair in which she had been sitting, and he also believed that, if he were not at hand, she would reseat herself in that chair. If he were at hand in a seatless condition, or, what was worse, having only a carpet deck stool to sit upon, she would insist on yielding his own chair back to him.

He did not want her to do this. He was anxious that she should appropriate his chair. He felt that if he succeeded in inducing her to do so he would have justified a claim to seat himself—in another chair—beside her.

It is questionable if the validity of such a claim would be acknowledged by anyone not accustomed to life as it exists on the quarter-deck of an ocean steamship. But it has already been stated that the fact of Bertha's having appeared in Charlton's deck chair was accepted by some of the best informed passengers as equivalent to his advancing a claim of appropriation of the girl.

This was, however, an exaggerated view to take of the incident ; but there was nothing extravagant in Charlton's hope that he might claim to sit on another and a much less comfortable chair in the vicinity of his own at any *time of the day.*

After breakfast he strolled quietly off to the bridge and took a cigar out of his case, and lighted it, as he usually did after breakfast, whether the day was fine or wet.

Several of the other passengers were smoking at this part of the ship, and one of them joined him in a languid stroll to and fro. The stroll forward was extremely uninteresting to Charlton, for only the forecabin passengers and the sailors around the fo'c's'le were visible ; but the return stroll was different, for then he could see all the quarter-deck, beneath the white sailcloth awning.

The first turn that he made enabled him to see Bertha Lancaster standing irresolute in front of the chair upon which her novel was lying ; then his tiresome companion, talking away on the topic which he had made his own—the necessity for an international gallery of photographs—turned right about, and it was quite a minute and a half before Charlton was in a position to catch a glimpse of the girl again. It was an outrageous waste of time, to be sure, but he had only to submit to it.

The next turn showed him the girl talking to her maid Miriam, who carried a cushion. Then once more, to the marching song of “to increase the consolidation of the British Empire, my dear sir, is to consolidate the guarantees of peace,” the view of the fore part of the ship was forced upon Charlton. When this barren waste was again behind him he was in a position to notice that Miriam had placed the cushion in the trustworthy chair which Mrs. Hardy had occupied, and that Bertha had sunk back into his own.

What exquisite feet she had, to be sure !

His companion was somewhat surprised at the eagerness with which he declared that he had never been so convinced of the magnificent possibilities of photography. The gentleman, who had attained to the dignity of a Nuisance in the House of Commons, felt that at last he had got hold of a sensible man.

A sensible man was, in his estimation, a man who would listen to his nonsense without a murmur.

In the course of the drone that followed on the well-known phrases "international intercourse," "our dependencies beyond the sea," "Imperial Federation," "strengthening of the ties," "the mother country," "the van of civilization"—in the course of this drone, lasting over an hour, Charlton had many opportunities of observing the quarter-deck.

He saw that Bertha was lying back with inimitable grace in his chair, and that she had not opened her novel.

Never had the Nuisance found a more rapt audience than Charlton. Even the Nuisance could see that he was lost in thought, now that he was placed in possession of the facts bearing upon the photograph question; and so he droned away more diligently than ever.

Why was she sitting in that way, Charlton was wondering. Why was she sending her eyes wandering vaguely over the wide expanse of waters, instead of over the pages of fiction lying on her knee? What was she thinking of?

Was it possible that she was thinking over that sentence which he had said to her, "I have met you"?

Was he justified in saying those words to her? Did he really believe in the depths of his heart that the satisfaction of his life was meeting with her? Most certainly he felt this. Then was he satisfied that his life should end here—that to obtain her love should be the be-all and the end-all of his life? Ah, could he doubt the reply that his heart made to his questions? He was not only content that his life should end in her—that apart from her he should never live in the world—but he felt that, having met her, he would not have the courage to face the future apart from her.

And yet he had not known her for longer than eighteen hours.

The possibility of securing to the nations of the earth *perpetual* peace by means of an exchange of photographs, was

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undoubtedly a fascinating topic ; but Charlton was heartily tired of it, and he surprised the Nuisance greatly by declaring that he must go below for another cigar.

Charlton had spent an hour and a half away from Bertha in addition to the twenty-nine years of his life which he had passed subjected to the same privation, and yet when he found himself within his cabin, instead of refilling his cigar case and hurrying to her side, he seated himself on the side of his bunk, and looked out of his port over the rippling waste of waters.

The bell had rung for tiffin before he stirred from this uncomfortable position ; and before he had changed his linen coat the saloon was ringing with the laughter and the pleasant chatter of the passengers who had descended for one of the pleasantest of the many pleasant meals aboard an ocean steamship.

He could hear the voice of Bertha answering the boyish seriousness of Charlie Barham. It was clear that the midshipman, who was being conveyed to England on urgent private affairs from the gunboat *Bluebottle* at Simon's Bay, had, in accordance with the best traditions associated with the British navy, not shrunk from the duty of making Miss Lancaster feel herself to be among friends aboard the *Carnarvon Castle*.

The girl was standing leaning with her hands behind her against her seat at the table, and the handsome lad was finishing his account of some incidents that had lately come under his personal observation, illustrating in the clearest possible way the extraordinary voracity of sharks in the Indian Ocean.

No story with a shark incidentally introduced can fail to be interesting. If told by a midshipman in her Majesty's navy who possesses a lively imagination, and who is at the same time quite devoid of all scruples, such a story may frequently become *enthralling*.

Charlie Barham had no foolish scruples on the score of veracity—voracity was his topic, which is quite another matter—so he succeeded in keeping Bertha enthralled. She stood beaming upon the boy, while he told her how the marine who was bathing, having once got a firm hold of the shark's tail, succeeded in steering the fish in the direction of the father of the boy it had just swallowed, when, owing to the happy accident of the father having brought an oyster knife into the water with him, for the purpose of detaching from the rocks the edible mollusks of which he was passionately fond, the brute was, after a sharp fight, destroyed ; then, to the amazement of all, the lad forced his way through the aperture in the shark's body made by the oyster knife, and was found very little the worse for his singular adventure.

"What arm of the service do you say the man belonged to?" asked Charlton.

"I said he was a marine," replied the midshipman.

"And did he tell the story to his messmates in the same corps?" said Charlton.

There was a little pause before all the audience except Bertha began to laugh.

"I don't see why you should laugh, Mr. Charlton," said she. "I don't think I ever heard a more remarkable story. I shall never forget it."

"Thank you, Miss Lancaster," said the boy. "I have told that story to several people, and I can safely say that I never yet found anyone to believe it. I will never forget your kindness. As for these idiots who laugh at it——"

He turned to give a look of ineffable scorn at Charlton ; but Charlton was deep in a chutney jar, and a look of scorn would be wasted on him, the boy perceived ; so he trotted round to the opposite side of the table.

So elated was he with his success that he told Miss Lancaster across the tablecloth another pleasant little story

he same type, respecting a man who was unfortunate enough to fall over the ship's side one evening in Simon's. The body was not recovered for a week, and then it was found so incrustated with specimens of mollusks that the commodore was able to give an oyster supper to the flag officers of the flying squadron that was in the bay. So it was the success of the entertainment that, when another man fell overboard from the flagship, the commodore at once issued invitations for a supper that day week. There was great consternation aboard the flagship, however, when the afternoon of that day arrived, and yet there was no sign of the oysters appearing. The commodore was greatly, and, as Mr. Midshipman Barham might, very reasonably, annoyed at the want of punctuality displayed in the matter ; but just as he had ordered a tug with drags to be cleared away, one of the men sang ' Oyster stall off port bow, sir,' and, sure enough, there were the materials for a supper, which Mr. Midshipman Barham at any rate had enjoyed thoroughly.

It can easily be understood that so long as this brilliant *amateur* was sitting opposite Miss Lancaster, Mr. Charlton had no chance of talking to her either respecting the subjects of modern science or on any other topic. He saw, however, that she was amused at this audacious boy's yarns, and he made no attempt to put in a word. He felt that as there was a considerable interval between tiffin and dinner, it would be particularly hard upon him if he failed to spend at least an hour beside the girl.

But he found that Charlie Barham was resolute in his determination to follow up the advantage which he had gained at tiffin ; for when Miss Lancaster came on deck, and seated herself in Charlton's chair, the boy assured her that she was doing herself an injustice in sitting in a seat that was manifestly so far from comfortable. If she would test the easiness of his chair, which he would have

pleasure in placing at her disposal, she would, he was confident, never return to Charlton's.

It was in vain that the girl protested that the chair which she was occupying was extremely comfortable; he would not be denied—she must at least try his.

Charlton watched the transaction from a distance. He saw the vexed look come to the girl's face in spite of her determination not to hurt the feelings of a young gentleman whose sensitiveness might still have survived a four years' service aboard a man of war. Charlton strolled across the deck to the scene of the struggle between the girl's courtesy and the boy's kindness. His approach was resented by a murderous glare on the part of the midshipman.

"Mr. Charlton," said Bertha, "I am being overwhelmed with kindness. Will you help me to assure Mr. Barham"—he had told her his name—"that the chair I am sitting in is the most comfortable on the deck?"

"Certainly," said Charlton. "But is it the most comfortable?"

"I want Miss Lancaster to try mine," cried the boy. "I don't insist on her appropriating it if it is less comfortable than yours."

"That's very considerate of you," said Charlton. "Pray give the chair a chance, Miss Lancaster. From a casual glance at it I am bound to say that I think it looks much more comfortable than the one you are in."

"Oh, I do not mind trying it," said the girl, her look of vexation vanishing.

She sprang to her feet and Charlie kindly placed his chair in the most enticing position beside the other, and held it as if it had been a horse that the girl was about to mount. It was undoubtedly a comfortable chair; and the Cashmere shawl which Charlie had fastened on the back—one that he was bringing home as a present to his sister

—gave it an appearance of magnificence that was truly Oriental.

Miss Lancaster sank into the chair and her shapely head rested on the Cashmere shawl. The subtle drapery made a most effective background for her beautiful face.

"There!" cried Charlie. "Come, you will confess that that is the very thing for Miss Lancaster," and he turned with an air of triumph to Charlton.

"I frankly admit it," said Charlton. "It is not only more comfortable, but infinitely more beautiful than this thing," and he moved his own a trifle closer to the other. "Yes," he added. "You are fortunate in having placed at your disposal, Miss Lancaster, a seat that suggests the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind, as well as the comfort of Tottenham Court Road."

Then he quietly sat down in his own chair just vacated by Bertha, and inquired of her if she did not think that the story which was in her hand—it was "*The Woodlanders*," was the greatest work of fiction that recent years had produced.

She replied quickly that she had read the book twice, and was now trying to get into a frame of mind to read it a third time.

"That is sufficient to tell me what you think of it," said Charlton. "I chanced to see you once or twice while I was having a cigar after breakfast, and I noticed that you did not open your book. When I found just now that that book was '*The Woodlanders*,' I felt that you were right to defer as long as possible the enjoyment of reading such a book. I wish I had it still before me."

Charlie Barham was standing in front of the chair which he had induced Miss Lancaster to occupy. He remained in that position while Mr. Charlton was expressing the wish that he had still the reading of Mr. Thomas Hardy's *best novel before him*, and he remained while Miss Lan-

caster replied that authors were so variable she had long ago abandoned the habit she once had had, of looking at the outside of a novel by a favorite writer for some days, anticipating the enjoyment that the reading would bring her. She now preferred, she said, the enjoyment of reading quickly, and thinking slowly over her favorites.

At this point Charlie Barham turned round and strolled away to the stern of the steamer. He spent half an hour looking over the side into the snows of the wake, and would not so much as give a glance in the direction of Miss Lancaster and the man—he was a very contemptible man, Charlie felt—who was talking to her, and occasionally, as he could hear, making her laugh. At the end of half an hour, however, his sulky mood had dropped from him into the wake of the steamer, and he went amidships to where a game of rope quoits was being played. He flattered himself that if he knew nothing about Thomas Hardy as a novel writer, he could knock the head off anybody aboard the ship at rope quoits.

When he came aft in an hour or two, Mr. Charlton and Miss Lancaster were still talking.

Well, what did he care? Let them talk.

Only he would be even with that fellow Charlton yet.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON A REVELATION.

MISS TRAVERS knew that it was a foregone conclusion.

And so it was.

He made no attempt to resist falling in love with her.

She made no attempt to resist falling in love with him.

The open way in which they fell in love with one another was almost indecent.

Miss Travers' reflections took this sequence as she watched Julian Charlton and Bertha Lancaster daily and nightly on the deck and in the saloon of the *Carnarvon Castle*.

It was outrageous, she felt, that they should make no attempt to conceal from their fellow-passengers that they were in love with one another—nay, they made no attempt to conceal it even from any of the crew. She herself had noticed a quartermaster, who came aft to relieve another at the wheel, put his tongue in his cheek and make a motion with his arms as if he were hugging someone, so soon as he had jerked his thumb in the direction of where Charlton and Bertha were sitting, Mrs. Hardy slumbering placidly in her chair by their side.

It was absolutely scandalous, she felt, that such things should be.

She had read accounts of the safety of ships having been imperiled through the evil deeds of their passengers. There was the case of Jonah—perhaps the most prominent on record. They had had a narrow shave aboard that vessel. Then there was the case of Philip Vanderdecken—not quite

so trustworthy, perhaps, but still good enough for operative purposes and full of point, and an apt illustration of what was on her mind.

She wished that the voyage of the *Carnarvon Castle* was safely over.

Even if they had not been attracted to one another by the peculiar circumstances of their meeting, they would, Miss Travers believed, have seen that they loved one another when they came together aboard the ship. Bertha Lancaster was adored by all the male passengers; Mr. Crawford confided to her the political significance of the *Walrus*, as well as that of the *Carpenter* in "Alice in Wonderland," and was ready to accept any suggestion she might make on a matter which had caused him many nights of earnest speculation—namely, the identity of the *Turtle*. Did she consider that the author's aim was to symbolize the City of London, or did he actually mean to satirize one eminent politician? The *Lobster* as an abstract principle was particularly susceptible of allegorical treatment, Mr. Crawford thought, and he should like to have Miss Lancaster's views on a point which, if not delicately treated, might jeopardize the value of his work.

Then the Parliamentary Nuisance confided to her his aspirations on the subject of the international photographic gallery, Cyril Southcote laid his choicest paradox at her feet, Captain Waring offered to teach her something of the general principles of poker, and Charlie Barham risked his prospect of eternal bliss by the enormity of the yarns he told her.

The captain himself had, it was rumored, put the steamer off her course in order that Miss Lancaster might obtain the view of the island of Palma, for which she had expressed a longing.

Yes, Miss Travers perceived that Bertha was adored by *all the men belonging* to the ship's company; though it was

a most remarkable thing that she was not made the object of the adoration of the women.

For the first few days that she had been aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* some of the ladies, headed by Mrs. Howard, had shown a disposition to discharge toward her that agreeable duty known as "taking her up."

She was so young, they said.

And inclined to be good looking.

And her aunt was so greatly given to slumber in the daytime.

The first step in taking up any girl is to get her to confide in you.

The second is to tell her her most conspicuous faults.

Then she is taken up.

But Bertha Lancaster was not without experience of this social rapture ; and she declined to be taken up even by Mrs. Howard, giving that lady to understand so much without a moment's delay, lest there might be any mistake.

The method which she adopted, with great success, was a simple one. When Mrs. Howard, with two other ladies, endeavored to get this young Australian girl to confide in them regarding her past life and its mysteries, she had informed them with artless simplicity that her father had been a convict.

The revelation produced a profound impression upon the ladies to whom it was made.

They took her hand and said they sympathized deeply with her, and then they found that they had some very important duties to discharge in other parts of the ship. Mrs. Howard believed that she saw Marian Travers beckoning to her ; Mrs. Glossop wondered how she had been so stupid as to forget her embroidery in the saloon ; and Mrs. Barnes, who was deficient in imagination, said she had a headache.

So Bertha was not taken up.

The same evening Captain Waring learnt casually from Mrs. Hardy that her late brother had left property in Australia of such magnitude that the income it yielded was close upon twelve thousand pounds a year, and that all had been bequeathed unreservedly to his daughter Bertha, with the recommendation to allow her aunt a tenth part of this income so long as she lived.

Captain Waring had no foolish scruples about spreading abroad this information. He spread it abroad; and the result was certainly not to diminish the girl's popularity among the men.

Mrs. Howard was no more reticent on the subject of the information she had received than Captain Waring had been on the subject of the money, and the result in this case was not to increase the girl's popularity with the women.

But when Mrs. Howard, out of a pure feeling of the warmest friendship for Charlton, informed him that she had discovered that that pretty Miss Lancaster, poor thing, had had a convict for a father, which was not, of course, her fault, poor thing, but which was still a very melancholy subject for reflection, Charlton had such a fit of laughter as caused some consternation to the lady. Several minutes had elapsed before he had recovered himself sufficiently to be able to apologize for his rudeness, and to assure Mrs. Howard that he had rarely heard of anything so melancholy as the piece of news which she had just communicated to him.

"You have a peculiar way of exhibiting your melancholy, Mr. Charlton, I must say," remarked the lady, when he had found it impossible to refrain from yielding to another paroxysm.

But when, in the course of the evening, Captain Waring told him that Mrs. Hardy had incidentally mentioned in her *own guileless way* that her niece's income amounted to

a trifle under twelve thousand pounds a year, Charlton did not laugh ; on the contrary, he became extremely serious.

During the next few days there were enacted aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* several scenes of a remarkable character. Mrs. Howard, and the two other matrons of the main, took occasion to inform every man among the first-class passengers, that the father of that pretty Miss Lancaster—they could now afford to allow that she was pretty, her looks being, as they considered, far more than counterbalanced by her parental misfortune—had been working out his time at a place called Botany Bay.

On receiving this information each of the men had become, as was only natural, as well as decent, extremely grave ; but, being men, they were skeptical on the subject of the disabilities of a girl whom they regarded as unusually pretty. They had consequently gone in turn to Charlton to ask him what was his opinion regarding the amount of credence to be given to the story of Miss Lancaster's parentage. Also because they were men some of them rather hoped that Charlton would be so shocked by the story that he would allow Miss Lancaster more time in future to devote to themselves.

Charlton did not hesitate to tell every man who came to him the true story of the late Mr. Lancaster's term of penal servitude ; and the result was that while all the ladies looked grave, and, with true delicacy of feeling, were careful to abstain from introducing any topic which suggested, however remotely, penal servitude, and which consequently might wound the susceptibilities of Miss Lancaster, the men were brutally, and quite unnecessarily, careless in their remarks regarding such topics. Captain Waring was actually heard to chant a vulgar song supposed to be sung by a convict, the chorus being a farewell to Great Britain, as the singer declared he was "going to Australia at her Majesty's expense."

While the chorus was being sung *sotto voce* by some of Waring's friends around a cabin skylight, the matrons sat mute and severe in the saloon, and glanced significantly at one another, when a roar of laughter followed the vulgar song.

Not for some days did they learn that that horrid girl who was so outrageously fond of the society of men, had actually been making fools of them—the matrons of many a campaign.

Thus the days went on, until the steamer had gained the latitude of Finistère; and Marian Travers stood on the grating beside the wheel, watching Charlton and Bertha standing side by side at the bulwarks, trying if they could see land.

It was a foregone conclusion, she admitted.

At the bulwarks on the opposite side of the ship Cyril Southcote had found an audience of one, and his words sounded—as he meant they should—through a considerable radius.

"My dear fellow," he was saying, "the greatest happiness that can ever come to a man in this life is to meet the woman who refused to marry him ten years before."

"And what about the woman who meets the man who refused to marry her ten years before?" asked Cyril's audience.

"She also is happy," said the philosopher.

"Happy? How?"

"She flings her children in his face," said Cyril.

"That's rather rough on the children," said his companion.

Marian Travers pondered upon this philosophy.

She sent her eyes out over the great deep. There also she found comfort. She knew that that element contained as fine fish as were ever hooked by man—or woman.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE KISS.

AFTER an extremely good dinner the passengers on the quarter-deck of an ocean steamship are disposed to be lenient critics of fiction. The two forms of this element which comes into prominence at such a time are the experiences of the captain, narrated to an admiring circle, and the protestations of the young men to the maidens—sometimes, alas ! to the matrons—as they sit together watching the stars appear in the sky.

On the quarter-deck of the *Carnarvon Castle* the usual stories were being told. The captain had finished his cigar, and had placed himself unreservedly in the hands of two pretty little girls—they had pretty little mothers—so far as story-telling was concerned.

Yes, he said, he had several times come into immediate contact with buccaneers off the Spanish Main, and the times that he had encountered pirates were really so numerous that he long ago ceased to remember any one in particular. Who was the funniest buccaneer that he had ever known ? Well, really he could scarcely say at a moment's notice who had been the funniest ; they had all developed such humorous characteristics it would be practically impossible to say to whom the palm for general fun should be awarded. For his own part he should feel compelled to decline making any invidious distinction between them, lest he might be doing an injustice to some worthy buccaneer of a sensitive nature. Were they usually sensitive ? Oh, dear, yes. They were, as a rule, so ridiculously susceptible that their own bosom friends occasionally shrank from entering into

any criticism of even their most superficial weaknesses—unless the critics were handy in the use of their revolvers. He had never personally known a buccaneer actually dying of a broken heart ; but he had certainly heard of one who died after drinking steadily at a gallon jar of Jamaica rum, and that was much the same thing. There's a difference between a broken heart and an empty rum jar ? Well, perhaps, strictly speaking, there is ; but the principle is precisely the same. At least after drinking the gallon of rum the buccaneer was just as dead as if his heart had been broken. His chief officer was so jealous of the memory of his commander, he had declared that he had died, not from the direct effects of the spirit, but owing to his mortification on discovering, as he did after a while, that the rum was not neat—that some unprincipled scoundrel had extracted a quart from the jar, which he had filled up with water. His chief officer declared that the shock of this discovery had been too much for his commander. Had he found out who the man was that had played such a trick upon him it might have been too much for the man as well. Yes, continued the captain, buccaneers are not invariably among the most temperate of men. They would be no use whatever to writers of romances of the sea if they did not drink pretty heavily. Some of them occasionally lapse into sobriety, and then they cease to interest anyone. He had once met a buccaneer who had been induced to sign the pledge at a tea meeting held in his native village. He kept his pledge too—that was the worst of it. A well-known romance writer had offered him a large keg of the choicest French brandy, almost a year old ; it was no use. He remained sober, and the terror of the Spanish Main—wherever that was. After many deeds of appalling bloodshed, people naturally were on the lookout for an instructive death scene in which the man should slowly perish of the ague *shakes* or something of that sort ; but no, he remained

sober and put in an appearance at all the tea meetings. It was found impossible to make away with him, so after many years of dishonest industry and strict sobriety he retired from business with an ample fortune.

"And what did he die of at last?"

"Why, he's not dead yet. After retiring from active buccaneering, he went in for a little farming; but he soon tired of this life. The fact was, he still had a hankering after his old trade. He sold his little property, and was about to buy the usual rakish looking schooner, when he met with a far-seeing friend, who advised him to abandon his project and get on the Stock Exchange instead. He took his friend's advice, but he didn't remain on the Stock Exchange. He declared that, though he didn't mind buccaneering, still he had something of a conscience left. He was then advised to join some speculators in America who were engaged in making a number of corners. He did so, and he is now happy and contented. He declares that he can scarcely tell the difference between his new and his old business. He has just bought the finest Holbein in Europe, and is the most eminent collector of Mazarin Bibles in the world.

"I wonder," said Charlton, "if you would be greatly surprised if I told you that I loved you."

The remark was addressed to Bertha Lancaster. She had not been sitting with Charlton, but with Mr. Crawford, the interpreter of "Alice in Wonderland." Mr. Crawford had, however, found it necessary to hasten to his cabin for the purpose of jotting down an idea that had occurred to him. "Why might the *Oyster* not signify Mr. Gladstone?" he had asked Bertha, in the course of his conversation.

"Why not, indeed?" she had replied, and with this encouragement he had risen—as indeed she hoped he would—and hurried within reach of his writing materials.

Charlton had been watching her for more than an hour, and now he bent over her chair, saying :

"I wonder if you would be greatly surprised if I told you that I loved you."

"No," she answered ; "I know you can no more help loving me than I can help loving you."

"And you cannot help it, Bertha?"

"I cannot help it. I have tried hard to avoid it with you as I have done with other men ; I had no difficulty so far as they were concerned, but I have found it impossible with you."

"I noticed a look of defiance on your face when you learned from your aunt that we were to be passengers on the same steamer. Did that mean that you were ready to defy Fate?"

"Yes, it meant that exactly. I know what was in my heart at that moment."

"And you know what is in it now?"

"I am as certain of it as I am certain that I am living. The thirsty man, who has taken a draught of spring water, knows that he has drank it. His thirst is gone."

"You have thirsted after love, Bertha?"

"I have thirsted after love—that love which means loving as well as being loved—that love which is the essence of the human soul—that love which is the natural yearning of two souls to become one—one through all time and into the space beyond."

"My beloved, say that it is the yearning of an incomplete soul for completion—the yearning of the river for the sea—the yearning—ah, Bertha, we cannot define it. If love could be defined it would cease to be love."

"It would," she said. "It would sink to the level of science or theology."

"It is enough that we can feel it beating in our heart."

beats, Bertha. My heart has found the life that makes it beat—my soul has found its sister soul."

He had seated himself beside her and he felt for her hand. She placed it trustfully in his.

They were sitting outside one of those brilliant tunnels radiating from the electric light of the quarter-deck. Only a few of the more restless of the passengers approached the place where they were sitting; still he did not think it prudent to make the attempt to kiss her.

He held her hand and looked into her face. Even outside the sphere of influence of the electric light he could see its white loveliness. He held her hand. He had a sudden yearning to kiss her.

From what source the yearning to kiss her sprang, it would perhaps have been difficult for him to say. "Soul meets soul on lover's lips," Shelley sang. But Mr. Charlton and Miss Lancaster had just been expressing their fervent belief that their own souls had met and mingled and become one, without the necessity for introducing the mystic agency of a kiss. On what grounds, then, should he yearn for that wholly superfluous kiss? The kiss has received the apostolic benediction, but only as a mode of greeting between brethren. Unfortunately it was not the kiss of brethren that he yearned for. It was the kiss inspired by Eros, who, we know, was intimately connected by birth with Aphrodite. That family has, for a considerable number of years, had an evil reputation, especially among such persons as live only in an atmosphere of spiritual love, which is just the opposite to that system of life of which Aphrodite was an exponent.

Just as his yearning was at its highest the electric light gave a couple of intoxicated blinks, then shone forth in renewed splendor for about a minute, and then went out. The blackness of darkness into which the deck was plunged was *appalling*. It did not, however, cause Julian Charl-

ton's yearning to be eclipsed. In a second after the light had gone out he had his arms about Bertha, and was kissing her passionately on the lips.

What was extremely curious was that she did not seem to be in the least surprised. She actually seemed to have had that yearning, which found its culmination in that kiss.

Alas ! the flesh was willing but the spirit was weak.

The apostolic kiss was not founded on such a proportion of the two elements. Spirituality is its strong point.

This is possibly why the apostolic kiss has ceased to be popular, while the other shows no sign of being superseded by a glance into the interior of a black hat.

Then the fickle illuminant of the deck flashed forth once more, after an uncertain minute or two.

"There is some defect in the insulation," said the captain. "The earth contact is probably defective. That sacred spark, you must know," he continued to his worshipping circle of girls—"that sacred spark only burns clearly when the contact with the earth is well defined."

"What does he mean?" said Bertha, in a low tone.

"He is talking elementary science," replied Julian, a trifle huskily.

"Oh ! "

CHAPTER XV.

CONCERNING PROPOSITIONS.

IT is delightful to awake with that feeling which thrills one to the finger tips, as it thrilled Julian Charlton when he opened his eyes in his bunk on the port side of the *Carnarvon Castle*—the feeling that one has one's love returned. Sometimes this feeling prevents one from closing one's eyes at night. In such a case the pleasure of awaking with a consciousness of being thrilled by that feeling is lost.

He did not hurry on deck, as he had frequently done on other mornings, when he regarded as wasted every moment spent apart from Bertha. When he found himself by her side and the side of her aunt, he saw that Bertha's face was roseate. Her lips were particularly brilliant.

Could it be that the dye of that fervent kiss of his had remained upon her lips, and her face, he wondered.

Mrs. Hardy looked at him and smiled. Then she looked at Bertha and smiled again.

Could it be that Bertha had during the night informed her aunt that her soul had been successful in its search after its long parted sister soul?

If she had done so Mrs. Hardy was clearly ready to offer him her warm congratulations—the congratulations of a mother in Philistia. He shrank from such a tribute to his success in wooing.

He felt that the acknowledgment that any success had been achieved by him had a tendency to diminish the mystic element which undoubtedly entered largely into the love existing *between himself and Bertha*. The Roman braves

were to be congratulated upon their successful wooing of the Sabine maidens ; but there was nothing particularly mystic about such a wooing. It was not a rushing of kindred souls together—the mingling of sister spirits. It did very well for the Romans, and for the Sabines also ; and it produced a race of some distinction in their day. It would not do for the latter years of the nineteenth century, however.

Mrs. Hardy smiled away, first at Bertha, then at Julian, then at both of them, then at the much sounding sea, then at the poached eggs on the breakfast table.

"Dearest," said Julian when he found himself alone with Bertha in the empty saloon after breakfast—"dearest, have you told your aunt that we are——" He was going to say "engaged," but he hesitated—the word sounded commonplace—"bound to one another" was the phrase that he found after a pause of a few seconds. "Have you told her that we are bound to one another?"

"I have told her nothing," said Bertha. "Our bond concerns ourselves alone."

"Then why did she go about smiling in that suggestive way?" said he. "I actually feared that she was about to offer me her congratulations—just as if we were the ordinary lovers of society."

"Oh, no," said Bertha. "It could never come to that."

"But how can she know that——" Again he hesitated, and this time the exact spiritual equivalent for the mundane phrase which was in his mind did not at once occur to him. He could not blurt out "that there is anything between us." There was nothing between them—that was just the point on which most emphasis should be laid. Their souls had mingled.

"She can know nothing ; I have said no word to her," answered Bertha, without waiting for him to find the *exact phrase of which he was in search*.

"But I am certain from the way she smiled——"

It was now Bertha's turn to smile.

"The thief doth think each bush an officer," she whispered, looking into his face with sparkling eyes.

"Perhaps so," said he, with a responsive laugh.

But all the same he felt that Mrs. Hardy perceived that he had told Bertha that he loved her, and that Bertha had not received the information in a hostile spirit.

He was set wondering how it could be that a commonplace elderly lady, whose greatest trials in the world were steps and stairs, was able to read a matter which he believed to be a profound secret—in fact a mystery. By what means did that lady, who seemed to devote so large a proportion of her few waking hours to the consideration of such comestibles as possessed a minimum of flesh-forming qualities—by what means did she discover that he and Bertha had come to an understanding with regard to the unity of their souls? (That was the phrase he wanted.)

Even if Mrs. Hardy had been awake—which she had not been—when the electric light had blinked and gone out, she could not have witnessed the little incident which followed, leaving their faces flushed and their hearts beating with unusual rapidity.

He began to think that Mrs. Hardy was gifted with higher powers of perception than he had placed to her credit. Of course it was ridiculous to fancy that Mrs. Hardy could understand anything of that mystery of mingling souls which constituted real love; but that system of smiles which she had developed in the course of the morning plainly suggested to him that Mrs. Hardy would, with a little encouragement, have actually expressed to him her warm congratulations upon a matter which she would probably have termed their engagement. (A horrid word!)

He had a curious shrinking from commonplace congratulations; and this caused him to remain apart from

Bertha nearly all the day. He actually fancied that his adoption of this drastic measure would prevent anyone among the passengers of the *Carnarvon Castle* from following the example set by Mrs. Hardy, so far as her smiles were concerned. It was quite likely, he could not help feeling, that some persons aboard might have been led to believe that he had been showing attention—that is how they would put it—to Miss Lancaster. He determined to put an end to such impressions, and so he kept apart from her during the day.

That should do the business for him, he felt.

The result of his pursuing this course was that Captain Waring remarked to Cyril Southcote:

"That fellow Charlton is further gone than I thought. It's my impression that he has landed her. He had been denouncing poker as the last refuge of the brainless, but this morning he asked me if I would have a game. He won thirty shillings from me. He couldn't have done that if he had had anything on his mind."

"Is Saul also among the prophets?" cried Cyril.

"Saul—Saul? What Saul?"

"Is the Bayonnetteer among the psychologists?"

"The what?"

"The Introspectors."

"You are madder than ever," said Waring, turning away. "I say that a man can't have the two things on his mind—a girl and poker. He must give up either the one or the other."

"And Charlton has, you fancy, given up the girl?"

"He has made certain of her—that's all the same. He won thirty shillings off me."

"That's conclusive."

"It would be to any fellow of ordinary dullness, like the most of us. I don't suppose it would satisfy you, Southcote."

"My dear friend," said Southcote, "any opinion that you may pronounce regarding poker would be thoroughly satisfactory to me."

By this Mr. Southcote wished it to be understood that he estimated at a very low value any opinion that Captain Waring might be led to pronounce on another subject. But however this might be, no sooner had Charlton gone on the bridge with a cigar after dinner than Cyril said to him casually :

"By the way, Charlton, do you remember expressing the opinion, when we were conversing on the subject of the phenomenon of love, that the process of mutual attraction was gradual, not sudden?"

"I remember perfectly well," said Charlton.

"And you recollect, perhaps, that I expressed my belief in the sudden process?"

"Perfectly."

"Have you given any thought to the subject in the meantime, may I ask?"

"Thought? no—I have thought nothing about it."

"Then you hold your opinion still?"

"Anything but that," said Charlton.

"What? But you said you had given the subject no thought?"

"And do you fancy that any human being ever came to a satisfactory conclusion on such a subject by thinking about it? Do you really fancy that the phenomenon, as you call it, is an intellectual process?"

"Certainly I do not. The first symptom of the disease has often seemed to me to be a paralysis of the intellect."

"Then why do you assume that the conclusion I have come to is the result of thought? You should be ashamed of yourself."

Charlton seated himself and felt in his pockets for his match box.

Cyril Southcote was actually ashamed of himself—for close upon a minute and a half ; then he lay back in his chair, looked at Charlton, and laughed.

But while Charlton was having his smoke on the bridge, in pursuing the policy of disarming suspicion among the passengers, Miss Lancaster was honored with three proposals of marriage inside the space of an hour and a half.

This is rather over than under the average to which young women have to submit in the course of a contemplative evening. But then all young women are not blessed with an income of their own amounting to over ten thousand pounds a year. If they were, the returns of the Registrar General bearing upon spinsterhood would present a healthier appearance than they do just now.

The Parliamentary Nuisance—the disguise of the individual under this name is perfect ; for who could identify a cat from being told simply that the animal was white ?—approached the girl's seat almost immediately after dinner ; and in the course of his conversation remarked that if he could induce Miss Lancaster to become his wife, the future of the International Gallery of Photography might be regarded as certain. Miss Lancaster assured him that, though the prospect was fascinating, still circumstances precluded the possibility of her assisting the Nuisance in the capacity in which he had suggested she might appear by his side.

On hearing his fate he was downcast for some time ; but his nature, naturally sanguine, had been rendered still more callous to rebuffs through his being called to order by the Speaker almost every time that he got up to address the House ; and he left Miss Lancaster's side assuring her that he would hope.

The place which he had vacated was almost immediately occupied by the interpreter of "Alice in Wonderland." He

wondered if Miss Lancaster could suggest what was meant by the *Seven Maids* with *Seven Mops*. That was a point which had, he knew, to be faced sooner or later. Now who were the *Maids*? What were the *Mops*?

"Seven," said Miss Lancaster thoughtfully. "Why should the number specified be exactly seven? Why not four, or six, or, for that matter, five or eight, unless the author meant to suggest something of importance? Is not the existing system of British parliaments septennial?" she inquired.

Mr. Crawford started to his feet and took a few steps hurriedly up the deck to conceal his emotion.

He did not return to his seat for some moments; when he did so at last he laid his hand upon hers.

"Miss Lancaster," said he in a voice that was slightly tremulous, "I am middle-aged, a student, and a literary man."

Bertha looked at him. What could he mean, she wondered, by formulating this progressive list of misfortunes.

"I have also a daughter," he said, as if by way of culminating the catalogue. "But I have been a widower for five years," he added, brightening up; "and if you could see your way to join your fate with mine in the enterprise which I have at heart, I do not think you would ever regret it."

"Mr. Crawford," said the girl, "I am not so certain about the septennial parliaments being referred to. There are *Seven Maids* with *Seven Mops*, you must remember—that is, fourteen in all; that puts a new complexion on the matter."

"It does," Mr. Crawford admitted after a pause. "But, regarding the other subject——"

"Then, if we find that our first idea was wrong," said the girl, "should we not learn to think twice over every matter of importance before deciding upon the exact course which should be pursued?"

Mr. Crawford was silent for some time. Then he said,

"You are right, Miss Lancaster. One should not act precipitately in a matter that concerns both of us so nearly. If, however, I find that there were fourteen cabinet ministers in the House of Commons when 'Alice' first appeared, I will not shrink from what I believe to be my duty. I will go below and make a note of your thoughtful suggestion regarding the septennial parliaments."

He rose and made for the companion; but when about halfway across the deck he stopped and stroked his chin, as if suddenly recollecting something—to be exact, as if he recollected having forgotten something. He glanced back at Bertha for a moment, and then walked on.

Before he had disappeared into the companion Charlie Barham was sitting in the seat he vacated.

"Have you ever seen a fly in amber, Miss Lancaster?" he inquired.

"Never," said she.

"I have. It's a rummy sort of thing. You are like one."

"Oh, I say, Charlie, temper your justice with mercy."

"A fly is, we all know, a beautiful, lively creature."

"It is lively, at any rate—I admit so much."

"So are you—you are lively, and bright, and beautiful, and—and yet you scroodge yourself in among a lot of fossils—amber is a fossil, I suppose—so that one wonders how the—that is, how on earth you got there."

"How on earth? Ah, I was afraid you were going to suggest a supernatural element as accountable for my position. Well, what is the moral of all this about flies in amber, and fossils, and me?"

"You were meant for something better, Miss Lancaster."

"Nothing could be better than to point a moral, Charlie."

"Now don't you begin to laugh at a fellow. I'm serious now, and I want you to be serious too. We'll be in the Bay of Biscay early to-morrow."

"And you are getting serious already?"

"I mean that if it's anything like what it was any time that I knew it, we won't be thinking much about—about—what I'm thinking about now."

"And will that be a misfortune or otherwise?"

"There you go again. I don't believe you care a scrap for a fellow like me."

"There you make a mistake. I do care a great deal for you—never having met a fellow like you before may account for my infatuation."

"Ah, Bertha, Bertha, this is not love?"

"No, it certainly is not love."

"And nothing less will satisfy the craving of my heart; let me tell you that. I know that you will offer to be a sister to me. I don't want that. I know too much about sisters to want any more."

"Charlie, I'm ashamed of you—indeed I am; I thought better of you than this."

"I expected this"—and the boy bent his curly head down to his hands, his elbow being on his knee. "It is my fate to stake the future happiness of my life upon one who scorns me—I have done it before now. But I did hope a little—never mind, I can bear it, if only you do not bid me despair. I am seventeen now—yes, and a half—and I shall be a sub-lieutenant in perhaps two years—in five more I may be a lieutenant—with good luck. Five and two are seven. It sounds a long time—seven years; but if you promise to wait I'll do the same."

"Charlie," said Bertha gravely, "you are the nicest boy I ever met. If we were among all the passengers in the saloon I would kiss you."

"Ah, no, don't say that! Surely my case is not so hopeless as that."

"It is. I would have no hesitation in kissing you in the daylight in the *middle of the saloon*—you are such a nice boy."

Charlie groaned.

"You are only not nice," she continued, "when you talk nonsense. Now, tell me a good story—don't spare me. I'll believe it all."

"I will tell you a good one I have had on my mind for the past few days," he cried. "But all the same," he added in a subdued voice, "I love you, and I never will love anyone else."

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE VOICE THAT BREATHED O'ER EDEN.

THE steamer slid into the Bay of Biscay and slid through that watery area as though it had been as remote from disturbance as an ordinary mill pond. A dead calm caused the waters to slumber peacefully; and the speed of the vessel was never less than fifteen knots. The playful demons of the bay, whose pranks are usually experienced by passengers who may fondly expect to sit at the tables without having their plates protected by that mahogany framework known as "fiddles," seemed to have become suddenly melancholic. The tables were not turned into switch-back railways in miniature. The *vol-au-vent* was not sent sliding into any lap. The likeness to a projectile of an ancient type, which was suggested by the appearance of the plum pudding, was not more deeply impressed upon the passengers by the motion of the comestible, however the illusion may have been strengthened by partaking of a portion of it.

The Bay of Biscay, which had been occasionally referred to by the passengers with bated breath, was found to be nothing particular after all. Those who had been most awe-stricken in alluding to it were now quite jocular on the subject of its terrors. They alluded to it in familiar, not to say flippant, terms. The Bay of Biscay was to them what the Lord Chief Justice of England is to the attendant in the Turkish bath which his lordship may frequent.

People who scoff at the Bay of Biscay will scoff at anything, just as those who sneer at Mesopotamia cannot possibly *revere any principle*.

Aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* the laxity induced by the smooth surface of the bay, entered into the passengers' consideration of the love affair of Mr. Charlton and Miss Lancaster; for no one who has ever taken a long voyage aboard an ocean steamer needs to be told that the most elaborate precautions on the part of whatever lovers are aboard do not deceive their fellow-passengers. In spite of the fact that Charlton smoked an unusual number of cigars on the bridge, and showed a dexterity at the game of poker which quite upset Captain Waring's calculations, it was soon known among all the ship's company aft that Charlton had asked Miss Lancaster to marry him, and that she had consented.

But this was just what Charlton had not done. He had merely told the girl that he loved her, and asked her if she loved him. Though men occasionally marry the women to whom they have declared their love, there are instances on record of such a declaration having been made without a word on the subject of marriage having followed.

It is, however, generally admitted that such incidents are unsatisfactory.

Julian Charlton had avoided as long as possible all reference to such a commonplace topic as marriage, in the course of his converse with Bertha. Every man believes that, in the matter of love, his own case is absolutely unique; but his marriage he must admit to be but one in some hundreds of millions of precisely the same type, since the days of the Voice that breathed o'er Eden.

"Dearest," said he one evening in the Bay of Biscay, "I do not think you ever told me what your arrangements were with regard to England."

"I never did," she replied. "You never told me what were yours," she added, looking at him with eyes overflowing with pure joyousness.

"You never told me what ready money you have, or

what you hope to have in the future ; some of the good people aboard seem to know all about it, however. They say something about twelve thousand a year."

"That is the exact sum, only that I allow my aunt a thousand a year, and pay her traveling expenses, and buy her her bonnets. I do not know how to spend more than about the same amount myself, though I do my best to be extravagant. I hope I shall learn to spend the other eight or ten thousand in England."

"It is a fascinating branch of education, Bertha."

"You shall teach me, my beloved."

"Nothing could possibly give me greater pleasure. But you have actually a larger income than I have : I don't believe that, even in the years when none of the farms are thrown on our hands, I have more than about seven thousand pounds to spend."

"In any case, we should between us be able to keep the wolf from the door."

"The wolf ? an entire pack, my dearest."

"Then we need talk no more about money, when there are so many beautiful things to be talked about."

"I agree with you. Then let us talk about the sweetest subject that exists, Bertha. When are we to be married ?"

"When ? Ah, Julian, I am ashamed of you ! When ? Were we not married in spirit the first hour we met—nay, were our souls not wedded from the instant they breathed the same air of this world, just as they were in that past existence of our souls of which we remember nothing ?"

"My dearest !" and he pressed her hand fondly if furtively—"who can doubt, from the mysterious way we met, that we were brought together through the subtle influence of a Power which we can only dimly understand ? We were *made for one another*, dearest."

"There may even be you and me by running away our marriage, as if we were bound up in the future—something like your wedding, don't you?"

"Why—"

Julian Charlton paused and looked at the eyes in his fingers for some moments.

"What were you going to say?" she inquired.

"I don't know what I was going to say," he replied: "oh, yes—oh, my darling, do you fancy I have a doubt in my mind on the subject of the union of our hearts—of our wills? We are indeed one—one in the sight of that Power that brought us together. But I would have you for my wife—I would have you by my side always."

"And were you unkind enough to fancy that I was going to run away to the uttermost ends of the earth, leaving you alone? O Julian, my life is bound up with yours. I can never leave you."

"My beloved! I have never heard such sweet words spoken on earth. You are right. There is no need for us ever to part now. I will get a special license—the wedding cannot be too quiet. What do you and I want with a crowd of people coming to the church to watch the ceremony? What is all the rest of the world to us, my beloved?"

"Nothing," she cried decisively—"absolutely nothing; and that is why I say we are already wedded as indissolubly—nay, far more indissolubly than if the archbishop were to give us his benison—well us his benison, I should rather say? for I believe your special license is an article of commerce."

"That is perfectly true, no doubt," said Charlton slowly, and without any manifestation of enthusiasm. "Still, my beloved—well, we shall have to be content with the registrar."

"The registrar?" said the girl. "Why, that is just the

same principle. My dearest love, cannot you see with me that, when a man and a woman are bound together by the ties of a love such as ours, every form and every ceremony making up what people of the world call a marriage, is only a mockery—an insult to love? ‘Whom God hath joined’—it is the arrogance of the priest to assume the office of God. Dearest, I am on the side of God as opposed to the priest. God has joined us by that strong love which is sacred, indissoluble, mystic. It is the priest who, for his own profit, has declared that until he has pronounced those sacred words there can be no marriage. Just think of the mockery of it; he will pronounce those sacred words between any two people—any man and woman who come before him bearing a duly sealed document, which has been paid for like an ordinary chattel. God joins people by the mystic, spiritual bond of love. Does the priest make any inquiry with a view to find out if this bond exists between any couple who come before him for the purpose of hearing him declare that ‘Whom God hath joined let not man put asunder’?”

“I suppose not—that is their lookout,” said Charlton.

“Then it is a mockery—that ceremony which they call marriage,” said the girl.

“It has done the world pretty well for some thousands of years, Bertha.”

“No, it has done the world very badly, Julian. Can anyone doubt that much of the misery which exists in every civilized community—which actually seems to be the product and attendant of civilization—is caused by marriage—legalized compulsory union? That sort of union is enslavement. It is the union that existed between Bonnard and his pillar. ‘Whom God hath joined let not man put asunder,’ the policeman says as he slips the handcuffs over the wrist of a man and the wrist of a woman who stands by *his side*. Does your idea of the union of souls

lead you to believe that the hands must be manacled as well, otherwise there is no union?"

"My dear Bertha, to tell you the honest truth, I have never given the subject more than a casual thought. Where there is no love I have always felt that marriage is worse than mockery."

"And when God has given his best gift of love to a man and a woman he has made them one—this is a marriage that is not a mockery; and I do not mean to be one of those people who go to the priest or to his civil equivalent to have this spiritual bond transformed into a pair of iron manacles."

"But, my love, if people who have no spiritual bond uniting them choose to make a mockery of marriage, that cannot be regarded as a reason why marriage should not be accepted in its proper spirit by those who have been joined in soul by love—such love as ours, dearest?"

"Cannot you see, Julian, that you are now confusing the true idea of marriage with the idea of the ceremony known to the world as marriage?"

"Perhaps I am," said he thoughtfully. The fact was that he had become suddenly thoughtful, not upon the delicate distinctions which the girl seemed to be able to draw, but upon quite another matter.

"Yes," she continued; "I do think that you fail to see that for us to go to the church and to ask the priest to join us in what is indeed a holy bond, would be equivalent to an acknowledgment that God had not joined us in that holy bond, the moment we loved one another."

"My God! Bertha, do you mean to say that we should live together as man and wife without going through any ceremony?" cried Charlton.

"Ceremony?" said she after a pause, during which her face was suffused with a lovely blush. "Ceremony? O Julian, I am ashamed of you!"

"Forgive me, my dearest," said he ; " but, really, there are times when one should speak in the plainest language."

"Such times should be always with you and me," said she.

"But you do not mean—— Why, think of——"

He really could not bring himself to ask her to think of their children. Even the plainest speaking must have its limits.

"My dearest love," she said, smiling, "do you really fancy that I have come to this conclusion—the gravest that any woman could arrive at—without having considered the matter from every standpoint?"

"I am sure you have not," he replied gravely. "But we must remember that if we have——"

"If we have what?" She looked bravely into his face. Now was his time.

"If we have—have made up our minds," he said, commencing boldly, but finishing weakly under the influence of her straightforward gaze. "If we have made up our minds to marry we must not forget that—— Good God! You cannot fancy that it would be practicable for us in England to carry out your ideas?"

"Why should it not be practicable?" she asked. "You agreed with me just now that the world, with its ways—with its conventionalities—was nothing to us. It is the world and the prejudices of society that have led to the accumulation of error—that have led to the expulsion of everything that is spiritual and the cherishing of everything that is material. Marriage, according to society, is a social contract. Some good people call it a sacred, religious contract; others maintain that it is a purely civil matter—all agree, however, that it is a social contract; and all agree in the absolute necessity for having the machinery of the divorce court in good working order. My beloved, do we not know, you and I, *that the only indissoluble marriage is that which*

has brought us together, making us one by that love which is God's best gift and God's deepest mystery?"

"Can I doubt it, Bertha? Only—England!"

"England is no more to us than any other part of the world. Why, I do believe that you will talk to me of Mrs. Grundy next."

"Bertha," said he gravely, "I can understand a pure-minded girl, such as you are, hoping to carry out what she believes in her heart to be a great plan to make the world look at a purely spiritual matter, such as we know love to be, from a spiritual standpoint, and not from a merely social standpoint. But, believe me, dearest, the world is too gross to be regarded as ripe for such an experiment as you suggest. The men and women of the civilized world require to be bound by such a contract as that which we call, for want of a better name, marriage. It is found necessary for the law of the land to be framed so as to punish the man who deserts his wife."

"Deserts the woman with whom he is living," said the girl quickly. "If she were really his wife—his wife as you and I and Heaven regard wifehood—he would never desert her. That love which alone is the mystic bond of true union does not come and go. It is eternal. It cannot be severed."

"I feel that every day, Bertha," said he. "I thank God that every day but increases my love for you. But I feel that I should be behaving as a scoundrel if I were to take advantage of your——"

"Do not say 'impulses,' Julian—say 'principles.' I have held these principles for some time—since I was seventeen, I think—three years ago. I have never had a hope of being able to realize my dream in this matter. I never felt the least suggestion of love for any man until I met you, and then I knew that the hour had come—I knew that *I must love you, dearest.*"

"And it is because I love you with all my soul, Bertha, I cannot do you the terrible injustice of—oh, it is out of the question."

He got upon his feet and walked quickly up the deck.

She followed him with her eyes.

Then she sighed.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TEMPTATION OF FAUST.

IT was a curious position for a man to find himself in.

Had it been the other way there are the strongest reasons for believing that it would not have been without precedent.

He was a moral man, as well as an Englishman, and he was thus led to regard with extreme aversion the idea of being the pioneer of a new cult—if the girl's theories could be called a cult.

He could not see that there was any more excellent way of living with a woman than by being bound to her by a legal marriage performed by a licensed clergyman of the Established Church, wearing a surplice, and holding open an awkward oblong book of common prayer, from which, with chilling indifference, he reads certain phrases of no particular delicacy.

All this, he knew, was disagreeable—almost ridiculous ; but it was essential to the comfort of matrimony and to the legitimacy of offspring. It must be faced, just as the dentist must be faced. This is precisely what he had always felt on the subject of marrying and giving in marriage.

But here was this girl, whom, with all his soul, he hoped to marry, endeavoring to show him a more excellent way of attaining to the happiness of marriage than by submitting to any ceremony.

He reflected, as he looked far away across the smooth waters, over which that prodigal millionaire the sun was flinging his gold, that, if he had come to the girl speaking

to her the words that she had spoken to him, he would be regarded as one of the greatest scoundrels in existence.

And yet he knew that the girl was the sweetest and most pure-minded that had ever worn the grace of girlhood. Every word that she had said was true—that was the worst of the matter. When people love each other truly they are bound together by the real bond of marriage. The appearance of a man and a woman before a priest or a registrar does not make the rite sacred. It is merely a form, this ceremony of marriage; but, unfortunately, the people of every civilized country have come to regard it as the seal of respectability.

Lovers, let them love never so well, could not, he was well aware, create a home unless they had gone through the ceremony of marriage. But a man and woman, even though they detested one another as heartily as husband and wife ever did, were regarded as respectable, and, consequently, commendable, provided they had been pronounced man and wife by the priest or the registrar, even though the priest's intellectual and spiritual services were appraised at so humble a figure as £120 per annum, and even though the registrar's intellectual labors were thought to be fully remunerated by the trifling *ad cap.* payment of half a crown.

What he had said to Bertha was perfectly true: he had never given the marriage question any particular thought. It had certainly never occurred to him to consider it from the elevated standpoint of spirituality. It was all very well to talk about the union of souls being the true foundation of marriage; and it was doubtless a fact that the union between himself and Bertha could not be made more complete if the marriage service were read before them in due form by the archbishops of Canterbury and York, with the Episcopal Bench forming a cordon round the altar while the ceremony was being performed. But then all couples

who presented themselves before the priests or the registrars were not like Bertha and himself : they had not that spiritual affinity which made Bertha and himself absolutely one in soul. And the laws which governed society were, very reasonably, framed to suit the requirements of the average man and woman, not the requirements of the exceptionally spiritual. Consequently society would not be disposed to tolerate such a breach of the social code as was suggested by Bertha. It would be impossible to explain to everyone that, in their particular case, the church ceremony was wholly unnecessary, the fact being that they had become one in soul the instant they had first met. This he perceived with absolute clearness. He had even a curious suspicion that if he were to attempt to make such an explanation to the most intimate of his friends, he would get laughed at. He questioned very much if such an explanation would be unreservedly accepted by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, who, being probably a very spiritually minded human being, should certainly be able to appreciate subtle points with something of mysticism about them. Why, even the Archbishop of Canterbury himself had thought it wise to go through the ceremony of marriage, though probably one of the most spiritual of human beings. It is this fact which compels the world to believe that the Archbishop of Canterbury is a human being. If it were not for this people might regard him as something altogether spiritual—say, a cardinal.

Into the question of the vows taken before the altar by a man and a woman standing side by side, Mr. Charlton did not enter in the course of his communnings with himself. He knew it would be absurd to do so. He knew that neither the law of the land nor the law of the Church regarded the taking of these vows as involving any sacred obligation either upon the man or the woman. If a man or a woman committed perjury in a court of law a criminal

prosecution followed, and a sentence of imprisonment; but if a woman disobeyed her husband, or failed to honor him, she was visited by no penal consequences. Of course if she went too far in one direction the husband might have his remedy; but the woman was not prosecuted by the law of the land for having perjured herself. As for the man, he broke his vows every day without incurring any penalty. Clearly, then, the ceremony of marriage, involving the taking of these vows, was regarded as a good deal less sacred than the ceremony involving the taking of an oath in a court of law.

Charlton dismissed the vow-taking aspect of the ceremony of marriage as unworthy of serious consideration. Indeed, the result of his contemplation of the whole question suggested by Bertha was a conviction that she was perfectly right in point of principle. If society could only be brought to perceive that there were exceptional cases—his case and Bertha's was an exceptional one—in which the ceremony of marriage was wholly unnecessary, all would be well. But he could not hold out to her any hope that society would be disposed to regard their particular case as exceptional. Of course society was astray in this matter as it was in many other matters; but this fact did not alter the aspect of the question so far as he and Bertha were concerned. If they meant to live among decent people they must conform to the mode of life and the prejudices of decent people; and among their prejudices marriage, as a ceremony to be gone through before a man and woman could set up a home, occupied a prominent place. To be sure, some people declined to conform to the prejudices of decent society—the teetotalers, for instance; then there were the vegetarians and the antivaccinationists and the lady who kept a hundred cats in her house. Such people were not popular.

Were he and Bertha, he asked himself, prepared to sink

to the level of vegetarians? Were he and Bertha ready to take their stand by the side of the lady and her hundred cats?

Then there was the question of children. Were he and Bertha——

He turned away from the sunset and walked straight to her side.

"Bertha," said he in a low voice, but without a falter—"Bertha, I cannot do it. I cannot do it, because I love you too well."

"Oh, my beloved," she replied, "I know that the measure of your love for me is as the measure of my love for you, therefore I know that we shall not be separated. It is not in your power to leave me now. You and I are powerless to struggle against love—the love that has made us one. You know that we have been made one. You are not the man to fight to the death against love."

"I will not do you this wrong, Bertha," said he. "I will not do you this wrong."

She shook her head and smiled.

"I forbid the banns," she whispered.

He walked up the deck without another word.

It was a curious position for him to be in.

Here was Gretchen tempting Faust, and Faust bringing to his aid to resist her all the moral principles which had been inculcated by the schools, and a good many more besides.

Would his intimate acquaintance with the moral principles of the schoolmen avail to render her simplicity impotent? Would that fascinating simplicity of this Gretchen prevail against the strong morality of this Faust?

It is a terrible spectacle—the struggling of that innocent dove, Gretchen, against the fatal fascination of that seductive Faust; but how much more terrible is not the spectacle of the artless Gretchen endeavoring to lure Faust on to

what the world has, for a considerable number of years, termed immorality !

"I will not be led away. I am firm in my morality," said this Faust to himself as he walked up the deck. "Yes, I have principles. I will never yield."

He turned and looked back at her. What an exquisite face she had ! What exquisite feet she had !

Alas, for the moral Faust !

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE THAMES.

JULIAN CHARLTON certainly meant to adhere to the resolution which he had formed in regard to Bertha and her principles. He felt that his resolution was a right one, even though he was ready also to acknowledge that her principles were founded upon the truth. She regarded from such an exalted standpoint that spiritual passion—if he might venture to call it a passion—known as love, she could not bring herself to consent to subject it to the indignity implied by the ceremony of marriage—the “manacles of the Church,” as she called it. It would be an affront to this love, which was a union of souls, to make it the subject of vows spoken in the presence of witnesses. Were she to do so she would be consenting to regard it from a material standpoint, divested of all its spirituality. It would be an insult to a man who had made certain statements, to insist on his taking an oath to their accuracy. It would be an insult to a man who had lived a life of temperance to insist on his “signing the pléde.” It would be an insult to herself, loving Julian as she did, to insist on her taking a vow before a number of witnesses to continue loving him. She did not care what the world would say. The world was usually wrong. The world had killed all its noblest teachers, but their truths had survived and truth would prevail in the end, if only people were not afraid of the opinion of the world. She believed that there were thousands of men and women who thought with her on this subject. They only needed to be given an example and they would all follow it. *She meant to be an example to them. She meant to be the*

pioneer of this faith—not a new faith, but the oldest that existed on earth.

This was the sum of her belief, and her belief was, he knew, that of a pure soul, full of aspirations after the highest form of life, and ready to face martyrdom, if necessary, for her faith. He also knew that it was the faith of a soul that knew more about heaven than it did about the world. Such were the souls of the martyrs from Abel down to Gordon. They knew too much about the inhabitants of heaven and not enough about the inhabitants of the nether world. Abel had had his experiences of Paradise ; but he was not a man of the world. He had not had a wide experience of men—circumstances were against him. Cain had no better chance than he, but he proved that he knew less of the ways of heaven than he did of the ways of getting the upper hand of his fellow-man. Gordon had his faith—chiefly in himself—but his knowledge of the exigencies of contemporary English politics was extremely limited.

Bertha Lancaster's soul had upon it, Julian felt, no stain of earth. She had a fervent belief in the spiritual nature of love, and she was only acting in sympathy with this belief when she refused to go through the ceremony of marriage with him.

Several times before the English Channel was reached he inquired of her if she meant that they should part. She smiled and shook her head as she had done before, saying :

"It is too late now. You know that it is not in the power of anything on earth to part us. Even if we should never see one another again we shall not be parted."

"I will not do you this terrible wrong, Bertha," said he more than once. "I am not a scoundrel."

"I know what is in your heart," she replied. "It is the same as that which is in my heart. You are a good man. *You are my love.*"

They continued sitting together and talking until the English Channel was reached, and with a blue April sky overhead and a gray, murky water parting before the bows of the *Carnarvon Castle*, the estuary of the Thames was reached.

He stood by her side, pointing out to her the various places of interest of which she had heard. She had heard of all except the Isle of Dogs. She had never heard even the name of this glory of the Thames.

Before the docks had been reached the passengers who had worshiped her had spoken their farewell words in her ear. They were very sad words—especially those spoken by Charlie Barham.

"If you are ever in need of a friend, Miss Lancaster," said he, "you may count upon me. I am yours till death. It is an infernally bad world this—I have had a pretty fair experience of it now—it's bad—it's hollow. True friends are not found every day. If you need a friend just telegraph to me. Even if we are stationed at Zanzibar I will come to you. You may trust me."

"Indeed I will," she said. "I should dearly like to kiss you, only I know you would not let me."

"No," he said mournfully. "I do not want to be made to feel that we are so very far apart. I never knew how great was the barrier between us until you offered to kiss me. Good-by. I hope you will never find out by bitter experience how hollow the world is. I have found it out. My heart has been the lead and my heart strings the lead line which I have heaved into the great abyss of the hollow world. I have sounded its hollowness to its full depth. Good-by. God bless you!"

Then the Parliamentary Nuisance came to her with an offer of an order to the ladies' gallery for any night she might desire to hear him speak.

"You are safe to drop in any time on chance," said he ;

"I generally speak every night. During supply I usually speak about six times every sitting. When I am at my best I have averaged as high as nine times. On exceptional occasions I have been called to order as often as eight times in the course of an evening," he added with some pride. "I am particularly fond of India and the Crofters. I do a little also on the Advance of Russia, the German Annexations in the South Seas, insults to the British flag in Central Africa, and the boy who was sentenced to four months' imprisonment for stealing a turnip—'Justices' Justice,' and so forth. Pray drop in some evening. If you come before I am called to order you will hear me speak. To a colonial our House of Representatives cannot be otherwise than imposing."

"Imposing," said Cyril Southcote, who had just come up. "Imposing—not merely imposing—the embodiment of imposition."

"Touching the *March Hare*," said Mr. Crawford, who also had come up to make his adieux; "could you suggest before we part, Miss Lancaster, whether this reference has an individual or a general bearing?"

Miss Lancaster looked at the interpreter of "Alice in Wonderland" attentively for some moments. She felt that if hard pressed she could identify the ante-type of the *March Hare*.

"It is a delicate question, Mr. Crawford," said she.

"Yes," said he, "it is a very delicate point. And yet it appears to me simple enough when you approach it in a proper spirit of inquiry. I believe the *March Hare* to refer to the Democracy."

"Perhaps so," said the girl.

"My dear Miss Lancaster, my conclusion is simplicity itself. The *March Hare* as a type of madness has its equivalent in the *Hatter*. Now, the vernacular of a hat is a tile, and the *Hatter* is consequently the tiler. Now, you

may remember that the originator of the democratic spirit was Wat Tyler, hence it is perfectly plain that the *March Hare* refers to the Democracy."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Crawford," said she. "I shall never forget your ingenious interpretations. The *March Hare* is indeed the best type of the spirit in which you have approached your work."

Mr. Crawford smiled, holding out his hand to her in a gracious way.

"I feel that you are flattering me," said he. "And yet my instinct—the trained instinct of the modern literary investigator—tells me that you are doing me no more than what is just. Yes, the *March Hare* may be accepted as a very good example of the system which we pursue—we, the modern literary investigators. My volumes will possibly be finished in the course of eighteen months—certainly, inside five years. I shall take care that you receive the earliest copies."

In due time all the passengers—they were mostly men—who had been among her friends, took leave of her. And then Marian Travers approached her with smiles.

"It has been such a pleasure to me to meet you," said Miss Travers. "But alas! these friendships of mid-ocean have more pain about them than pleasure. Even the most intimate end with the sight of the shore. Even such a friendship as—— I don't see Mr. Charlton anywhere."

"Neither do I," said Bertha.

"But surely," said Marian, with eyebrows and hands uplifted, and a smile full of meaning playing about the corners of her lips—"surely——"

"Oh, there he is," cried Bertha as Charlton appeared in the civilized attire of London, having put off the irresponsible garments of the Atlantic. "Mr. Charlton, Miss Travers says surely——"

"Indeed," said Charlton. "You are quite right, Miss Travers, as usual."

"I guessed as much," said Miss Travers. "Then I may congratulate you both."

"You may not congratulate me," said Charlton. "I am the most miserable man in the world."

"You may congratulate me," said Bertha. "I am the happiest girl on the River Thames—I suppose we are still on the Thames."

"I cannot quite understand," remarked Miss Travers. "One supremely miserable, the other supremely happy. What is to be the end of this strange condition of things?"

"God knows," said Charlton.

"Yes, God knows," said Bertha solemnly.

"I am mystified," said Marian. "Do you mean to say——" She looked first at Bertha, then at Charlton, with notes of interrogation at the corners of her eyes and her mouth.

"I mean to say nothing," said Charlton.

"And I mean to wait," said Bertha.

"I hate a mystery," said Marian.

"Then you hate a woman's heart," said Charlton.

"And a man's soul," said Bertha.

"I see that you are determined that I shall know nothing," cried Marian. "Never mind; I am not of a curious disposition. Good-by. I suppose we need not hope to have a gallop together in the Row, such as we used to have every day on the Flats," she added, turning to Charlton.

"I fear that we shall not," he replied. "I will only be in England for a week. I am going to South America. I believe there are a good many spots in the neighborhood of Tierra del Fuego that have never been explored."

Marian Travers gave an earnest look into his face—a look full of *inquiry*, full of *promise*, and not without hope.

When a gamester has only a minute and a half to run his game out of a difficult hand he is apt to become a little reckless, not to say desperate.

Charlton made no response.

She had lost.

"Good-by," said she.

"Good-by," said he.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE POWER OF A NEW SENSATION.

"I ALWAYS regret landing," said Mrs. Hardy. "One good thing about a ship is that there are no stairs to trouble one—only nine down to the cabin, and there you are. The shore means stairs, and stairs are a great trial, as perhaps I mentioned before. I am sorry to land, though I am afraid I indulged too largely in flesh-forming foods at dinner. Albumen is a great snare."

"Are we to part?" asked Charlton as he stood by the side of Bertha, while the steamer was being warped into dock.

"It rests with you to decide," said she. "Why should we part?"

"There is only one reason," he replied. "I have not changed my resolution."

"And it is impossible for me to change mine."

"Then we must part. My wanderings are not yet over. I shall leave for South America next week."

"And I meant that you should be so happy—that the world should be made happy through us."

"That is the dream of a pure soul inhabiting a different world from ours. Thank God, I am strong enough to say good-by before it is too late."

"The world is too much with you, Julian."

"I have lived in it a good many years—too many to allow of my having any doubt as to the course I mean to adopt. Thank God, I am strong enough to do what I know to be right in this matter."

"*You are a good man,*" she said after a little pause—a

pause during which he kept his eyes fixed upon her face, trying to see upon her features the evidence of a struggle going on in her heart. Her features gave no sign of any struggle. Her heart was steadfast to her resolution. "You are a good man, and you were meant to stand by my side in carrying out this great work upon which I have set my heart."

"I cannot do it," said he. "That is my last word."

They still remained side by side while the steamer was being hauled into her berth.

"Look there!" cried Mrs. Hardy, hurrying to where they were standing. "Look there!" and she pointed to the breastwork of the dock, where a tall, middle-aged gentleman with a solemn cast of countenance was standing with a much younger man, of a much more agreeable type, by his side.

"Why," cried the girl, "it's Uncle Matthew and Eric Vicars. Now how on earth did Eric Vicars reach England? He was the last person whom we saw at Sydney."

Charlton saw a roseate tinge come over her face the moment her aunt had called her attention to the two persons who were now hastening—the younger man with a good deal more eagerness than the elder—to the gangway that was being swung out to the steamer. Bertha seemed to have forgotten that Charlton was by her side. She was watching the approach of the foremost of the men who had boarded the ship, and there was a certain amount of eagerness in her eyes.

This man, to whom she was giving all her attention, almost ran to her at last with both his hands stretched out to her. Charlton saw that he was handsome, with an expression of frankness on his face that was almost certain to produce a good impression upon a stranger. Curiously enough it did not produce a good impression upon Charlton.

"Bertha, Bertha!" cried the stranger, catching both her hands in his and holding them without showing the least sign of letting them drop. "After seven months here we are together again. When you left us it was springtime in Australia, and now you bring the spring to us here in England."

As the man spoke Charlton was conscious of a sensation that was altogether new to him. A singular passion throbbed through his veins and caused him to tremble. He felt an extraordinary interest in the man, and yet he felt that he had never hated a man until now. The sensation was new to him. He had never experienced the passion of jealousy, for the simple reason that he had never been in love before.

Then the elder man came up and put out a long, lean hand to Mrs. Hardy.

"Hannah," said he, "welcome back to your home. Niece Bertha, you are welcome. You have grown. Has it been in grace, eh?"

"Have you no eyes, Matthew?" said Mrs. Hardy; and from the tone which she assumed, Charlton knew in a moment that she was speaking to her husband. "Can't you see that she is grace itself?"

"Outwardly, yes," said Mr. Hardy; "but the inward and spiritual—is it there, is it there?"

"How are the carnisolists, Uncle Matthew?" said Bertha, her eyes overflowing with laughter.

"Oh, let the carnisolists, or whatever they call themselves, rest a while," said the young man. "Let them rest until I have had a good chat with Bertha. Come along, Bertha," he cried in that honest, frank voice of his, putting his hand inside Bertha's arm in the most confidential way imaginable. "Come along, and tell me all about your voyages. So you went to Calcutta?"

Bertha took only one step up the deck. She saw the

expression that was upon Charlton's face. It frightened her.

"There is plenty of time for us to have our chat," said she to her frank friend, Mr. Vicars. "I must first present you to Mr. Charlton. This is my old friend, Mr. Eric Vicars, Mr. Charlton."

Only for one second did an expression of suspicion pass over the open countenance of Mr. Vicars as he looked at Charlton. Then his hand went out with a flash in front of him, and as he grasped Charlton's eagerly and wrung it as if it had been the bough of an apple tree from which he was anxious to shake the fruit, his old straightforward look came back, and his eyes shone with warmth as he cried :

"Any friend of Bertha's is a friend of mine, sir ; that I can say with my hand on my heart."

"You are very good to say so," said Charlton, opening out his fingers, which had been disagreeably compressed by the enthusiastic pressure of Mr. Vicars.

"And this is my uncle Matthew, Mr. Charlton," said Bertha. "You have heard my aunt speak of her husband, I am sure."

Charlton was sure that he never had. He had formed the impression that Mrs. Hardy was a widow. He, however, shook hands with Mr. Hardy.

"Not a colonial ? I thought not, sir," said Mr. Hardy. "I thought I could detect the absence of the Australian pronunciation in your speech. We are a bit behind the colonials in pronunciation, sir. Even in the best circles at home we can only make the word 'no' a monosyllable. The advanced Australians make two syllables out of it quite easily. In some directions I have heard them make a try for three, but with only indifferent success. Advance Australia ! They'll do it, if you give them time."

While Julian Charlton was standing in front of Mr. Hardy he was quite aware of the fact that Mr. Vicars was

holding Bertha's hand in one of his own and patting it with the other, at the same time moving quietly up the deck, making a little fuss now and again, as if particularly anxious to get out of the way of the other passengers, who were greeting their friends from the shore ; and once again that novel sensation returned to him.

If anyone had told him that it was jealousy he would have laughed. He simply felt that if a sailor were to drop a sharp-pointed marline spike—as sailors sometimes do—from the greatest altitude possible to be attained on the mainmast of the steamer, and if that marline spike were to penetrate the skull of Mr. Vicars, he would not be annoyed.

This feeling could hardly be interpreted into one of regard for Mr. Vicars ; but, at the same time, if Charlton had been told that it was the product of jealousy, he would have laughed.

He was not laughing now. Mr. Vicars was—in that bluff, hearty, good-natured, frank, colonial style that seems the natural vocal expression of a stalwart, brown-faced, brown-bearded man with soft blue eyes and the heart of a little child.

Eric Vicars had this sort of laugh.

He had also the brown face, the stalwart frame, and the soft blue eyes.

He had probably also the heart of a little child.

Charlton would have liked to cut it out to make sure.

Mr. Vicars was still edging away, laughing in joyous thunderclaps, and giving proprietary pats to the girl's hand, when Bertha's eyes caught Charlton's.

She was by his side in a moment. Was it possible that she understood what that expression upon his face meant, though he himself did not know what was the passion that produced it ?

"O Eric, do help Miriam with that Saratoga," cried *Mrs. Hardy*, addressing Mr. Vicars, and pointing to where

Miriam was struggling with a large trunk that had just been hoisted from the hold.

Mr. Vicars was standing where he had been left by Bertha. He had his eyes fixed upon Bertha and Charlton with a curious expression in them for the eyes of a strong man with the heart of a little child to wear. Mrs. Hardy had to speak a second time before he seemed to be aware that she was addressing him.

"A trunk—where? Oh, I see. Certainly. I'm your man," he cried out in his heartiest and bluffest style; and he swung himself in his good-natured exuberance from the poop deck by a stay, his legs sprawling in that jovial boyish way of his among the heads of the people beneath.

Strong men with the simple hearts of little children can do such things without exciting remark.

"Bertha," said Charlton quickly, "I was wrong; you were right. If you can trust me, come to me. You are my wife in the sight of Heaven. We can afford to laugh at the world. I cannot live without you. It is laid on me to protect you forever—to hold you away from any danger that the world knows; I see it now."

His face was very pale and his hands were trembling.

Her face was flushed, but her voice was not tremulous as she said:

"I knew you would come to see with my eyes, dearest. I knew that your heart would not be afraid to speak what it knows to be the truth."

"Who is that man?" asked Charlton almost before she had done speaking. He indicated Vicars, who was behaving to the passengers, whose heavy luggage was being hoisted on deck, with that good-humored rudeness which comes so naturally to honest big fellows with the hearts of little children.

"Eric Vicars," said she. "Oh, I thought I had told you all about him."

"You never mentioned his name," said Charlton. "Who is he?"

"He is my oldest Australian friend," she replied. "He was overseer on one of my father's runs—a most useful man. He left suddenly three years ago, and then turned up at our house at Port Jackson. My father did something for him at that time, and promised to do more. He died before he could keep his word. Eric saw us off when we started for India seven months ago, and he has just told me that he came to England and hunted up Uncle Matthew—he has just been a week here. A mine that he had sunk his savings in has just turned out well. That is how he comes to have the money. He used never to have money. He has a large heart."

"How about the savings that he sunk in the gold mine?" asked Charlton.

"I suppose he must have managed to save some money that we knew nothing about," said she.

"No doubt," remarked Charlton. "Is he living with your uncle just now?"

"Yes; he could not bear to leave him after he arrived," said Bertha. "Poor fellow! he did not know by what steamer we were coming, and he has been down at the docks every day, boarding every steamer that arrived from the Cape. He came on the same chance to the *Carnarvon Castle* to-day. How delighted he was to see us! Eric has a large heart, whatever his faults may be."

"It is a peculiarity in the anatomy of such persons," said Charlton. "And you are now going to your uncle's house?"

"Yes; it is in Chelsea," said the girl. "I suppose that my aunt will drive from here; but I should much rather walk there with you, Julian. I suppose it cannot be so very far."

"It is not so very far," said Charlton; "only a trifle of nine or ten miles."

"Then the docks are not at London?"

"They are not exactly in the heart of London. I will ask you to let me have the address in Chelsea, so that I can come for you when you are ready to be my very own."

"But you will come with us now?"

"I cannot, dearest; I am not a colonial overseer with a large heart. But I will go and see you to-morrow between the hours of six and seven. I must hasten to my neglected home just now, and see that it is fit for the reception of a mistress."

He gave a little start and a gulp as he uttered the last word.

A Mistress!

That was the word which escaped from him.

He could not recall it. That is the worst about words. When they are spoken they displace a certain quantity of air, just as a pebble dropped into a still pond displaces a quantity of water. The circle of ripples broadens out from the center of the pool until it reaches the bank; and the ripples of air, caused by the speaking of a word, broaden out until the effect of that word is felt outside the limits of our world.

A Mistress!

CHAPTER XX.

ON AN OAK SETTEE.

JULIAN CHARLTON sat alone on the evening of the day of his arrival in England in the dining room of Brackenhurst Court, the place which he had inherited from his father, and which his father had inherited from Julian's grandfather. How many times "great" should be prefixed to the original grandfather who had built Brackenhurst Court in the days of the first Duke of Marlborough, he could hardly tell—he did not care to think. Sir Godfrey had painted the portrait of the original Charlton—a major of dragoons. His descendants had been beautified in turn by Sir Peter, Gainsborough, Sir Joshua, Sir Thomas, and so on down to Sir Francis, P. R. A., who had still a little time left over from hunting to bestow upon the art of portraiture, as it was understood twenty-five years ago.

The portraits were judiciously distributed through the great rooms of the Court. Behind Julian himself in the dining room were two Romneys—his great-grandfather and his great-grandmother—and in front of him were the two Grants—his father and his mother.

He had dined early, and as May was within a few days of arriving, it was light enough at half-past seven for him to be able to distinguish the features of the two portraits that hung on either side of the fireplace, in the grate of which a couple of logs flickered.

"When I got your telegram, Master Julian," the aged butler had explained, "I said to Mrs. Barwell, 'We'll have a fire lit on chance in the dining room,' says I, 'for he'll

have been in many a warm quarter since he left us, and we'll not have him sit a-shivering.' "

The light from the logs and the soft English twilight mingled in the room. He saw his father and his mother smiling on him as they had done years before. The pictures had a new interest in his eyes. His father and mother had met at the place where he had seen Bertha for the first time.

He had originally been impressed with his meeting Bertha because he knew that their meeting had taken place where his father had first met his mother. But now he was gazing at their portraits with renewed interest because they had met where he had first seen Bertha.

He kept his eyes fixed on them until nothing was left of the twilight but a blue patch in an opening in the lower boughs of a great elm on the furthest brink of the lawn. The red flickering fire light now and again touched the canvases, and then went flying around the polished surface of the black oak panels, brought by the major of dragoons from the Low Countries.

With the darkness there came to him an overwhelming loneliness—such a loneliness as he had never felt in all his life before.

She was away from him.

She had become a part of his life—the better part of his life. It seemed to him that there had never been a time in his life when he had not known her. Every hour during the past seventeen days—only seventeen days!—she had been in his thoughts.

And she was his own! She would soon always be with him—always by his side—always within reach of his lips!

The thought sent the blood coursing strongly through his veins; but the thought gave him no pleasure, for it came to him wedded with another thought:

"What would the originals of those two paintings say if

they were alive and had become aware of my resolution to place in the same oak chair that appeared in my mother's picture, a woman who would be——"

"They could not understand," he said out aloud, as he rose from his chair with an impatient movement. "They could not understand. I do not suppose that many people will understand. What is it to us whether they do or not? We can live for each other, not for English society."

He opened one of the windows and stepped out upon the terrace. There had been no time for any of the garden seats to be put back to their places—he had only telegraphed from London Docks at midday to have dinner ready for him—so he seated himself upon one of the stone steps leading down to the second terrace. There he lit his cigar.

The blackbirds were singing in their rich altos and baritone to one another away in the clipped laurels of the shrubberies. A cuckoo—the first he had heard for over two years—was heard in the distance, and over the park of elms the rooks were cawing, but very fitfully, for the blue of the twilight was darkening every moment. In the distance of dim woodlands there was a hint of the rising moon, now at its full. Behind him the lamp that the butler was carrying to the dining room glimmered from pane to pane. The flitter of a bat, the flutter of a moth, the flicker of a swallow—he was aware of each in turn. All were a joy to him because he knew they would be a joy to her, when she would come here to be his——

He got to his feet once more and walked quickly down the last steps and on to the brink of the broad fish pond on which the water lilies were floating. Here and there the splash of one of the fat carp which he knew so well sounded. Here at last was rest.

He seated himself on the concrete border of the pond and allowed his thoughts to carry him away. Over the

boughs of the distant trees a silver band of moonlight stretched. It swept across the grassy slopes and lay upon the still water beside him. In the mystery of moonlight the figure of a boy with bright hair ran out from the shrubbery and stood facing him across the fish pond. He started at the sight of that figure. He knew it well. He knew that he was looking at the ghost of his dead boyhood.

Then as he remained sitting there the silence of the night was broken by the sound of the church bell. At nine o'clock every night, in all seasons, it was the custom to ring the church bell. Even the oldest inhabitant, who could by judicious coaxing be brought to recollect occurrences as recent as Monmouth's rebellion, the execution of Charles the First, and, after a little persuasion, the stir caused by the appearance of the Spanish Armada, and all the talk there was when the news reached England that Lord Nelson had been killed at that time—even this interesting personage—who could read the Bible, only he didn't, without the aid of spectacles, resolutely declined to say positively in which reign this custom of bell-ringing at nine o'clock had originated.

But the sound of the bell brought back to Julian Charlton many memories. It brought back to him the memory of the two saddest days in his life. When the bell had tolled for the death of his mother he felt that he was alone in the world, for he had been his mother's constant companion. Just when he had come to understand his father the bell had tolled once more. Once again he asked himself if his father and mother were alive would he have agreed to take the step which he was contemplating.

"I'll not do it," he cried resolutely as he started again to his feet. "I'll not do it."

He returned to the house and threw himself upon the oak settee in front of the burning logs in the now lighted *dining room*.

The motion of the steamer whose deck he had only left at noon was still felt by him, as it is by most persons during the first day or two after a long voyage; and with this motion there came to him all the gracious memories of the past seventeen days, when Bertha had been by his side. There was no suggestion of sadness in any of these memories, such as there had been in his recollections of the years long dead. It was only when he thought of what the future would be without her that he felt overwhelmed.

Then the thought came to him of how he had seen her last. That man whom she called Eric Vicars had been by her side, smiling joyously upon her face opposite to his own in the cab. He had not failed to notice how the smile upon the man's face had changed suddenly into a scowl when he saw that the girl was waving a farewell to her lover.

If he were to go to Bertha the next day and tell her that, upon consideration, he found that he could not take her to himself unless she submitted to the ancient and commonplace ceremony of marriage with him, they should part.

And then?

There came over him once again that curious feeling which he had experienced for the first time in his life when he had seen her by the side of Eric Vicars. He felt certain what were the designs of this man Vicars in regard to Bertha. He felt certain that Mr. Vicars would not have any delicate scruples in the matter of humoring the girl. At any rate, if he had the least scruple, there were numbers of men who would have none.

Was he prepared, then, to see this virgin life sacrificed to the inclination of some other man—of some man who would be unable to appreciate that purity of soul which was actuating her to set at defiance a social law which nearly everyone looked upon as the very foundation of civilized society?

Was he going to stand by while she became the victim of that coarse fellow—he was a coarse fellow, Charlton felt—whom she had called Eric Vicars? It only required that some plausible adventurer should meet her—some scoundrel who would pretend to have principles identical with her own on the question of marriage, and she would become his victim. She had an income of several thousands a year—quite enough to tempt that coarse colonial, who had certainly come to England to find her, doubtless after preying for some time upon her father.

Charlton had a profound distrust of Eric Vicars. Who could avoid distrusting a man who had such an honest laugh? he asked himself. It is a peculiar instinct that induces men to distrust others who have a fine, straightforward way of laughing—when they are not looking at their neighbors out of the corners of their eyes, and others who wear a perpetual smile—when they are not cursing their wives for having a cook who sends underdone mutton to the table.

Charlton could not think of Vicars with patience. Was it not clearly his duty to save that young virgin life from such a man—from all men who would only be too glad to appropriate her and her money? That Mr. Hardy too, with his ridiculous theories and his semi-evangelistic airs—was he to be permitted to exercise his baleful influences over the girl, to get her to throw away her money, forwarding the interests of the society of carnisolists—as he called them in defiance of elementary philology?

Every moment made it plain to him that it was his duty to avert by all the means in his power the possibility of Bertha Lancaster's being made the victim of unscrupulous adventurers. Poor girl! She deserved a better fate than that.

He had but a poor opinion of his fellow-men when it came to a question of their accepting the companionship of the *most charming* girl in the world with an income of a trifle

under twelve thousand pounds a year. It was clearly his duty to protect her from them all.

"I love thee so dear that I only can leave thee," sang Mrs. Browning's heroic lover. That was all very fine and heroic ; but would the resolution bear to be regarded as equally heroic if the man was leaving the girl whom he loved to become the victim of an unprincipled adventurer ? Was there anything heroic in delivering her over to a life of degradation and misery ?

His mind was fully made up. He would be her protector. He would shelter her with that great love of his, so that no danger should approach her. She would never know anything but happiness with him. Oh, it was perfectly true what she had said : they were already wedded. They had the sanction of Heaven, whose best gift to man is love, for their union ; what did it matter whether or not a priest was concerned in the transaction ? All the hierarchy could not bring them nearer to each other than they were.

Heaven was everything. They were one in the sight of Heaven. That was warrant enough for him. As for that colonial adventurer—well, he would find out that he might as well have remained in Australia crushing his quartz. Bertha Lancaster would not be a gold mine to him.

He laughed aloud at the thought of the discomfiture of the colonial adventurer. His laugh was anything but frank and honest.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE ART OF LYING.

JULIAN CHARLTON spent an hour with his thoughts in the dining room, and then he went into the large drawing room, carrying with him a lamp. The delicate French decorations of the wall still remained covered with chintz, and the old ormolu candelabra were hidden in bags of oiled silk. The French cabinets with Watteau-painted panels of porcelain were, however, exposed, and the polished parquet of the floor glistened beneath the light of his lamp. He took the cover off one of the chairs and seated himself. It was a beautiful room, he knew; but what would it be when she had come to it—when she would be in that chair with her fair head lying upon the French tapestry which had been hidden beneath the chintz? The room was silent now, but soon the music of her voice and its sweet laughter would be heard there.

While he was thinking his thoughts Mrs. Barwell, the housekeeper, entered the room, but seemed surprised to find him there, and apologized for her intrusion.

"Why, I was just about to set out in search of you, Mrs. Barwell," said he.

"I didn't think you would leave the dining room, sir," said the housekeeper. "You said you didn't want this room put in order for you, or I would have seen to it."

"I merely strolled in to see if I recollected anything of it," said he. "I have not been in a better room since I left home, Mrs. Barwell."

"Do you say so, sir? Well, I'm pleased to hear it. I notice a spot of damp on the wall under that window; but

it may be nothing, after all. I had the floor done once a week, and the curtains shook every fortnight ; for let the moths get in and you may make up your mind to keep them in."

"It is a pleasant room, Mrs. Barwell ; it only needs one thing to make it the pleasantest in the world."

"The flowers, sir ; ah, I knew you'd say that ; only, you see, you came so sudden like on us at last, and you said you would not leave the dining room this evening."

"I wasn't thinking of flowers—at least not exactly. The fact is—well, I suppose a man must get married some time, Mrs. Barwell."

"You don't say so, Master Julian !" cried the housekeeper, lapsing in her excitement into an obsolete mode of address. "To be sure—to be sure ! Didn't they all say that it would be queer if you didn't find some young woman in foreign parts that would take your fancy ? And so you've been and found her. I hope the color is all right, Master Julian," she added gravely.

"The color ?" said he.

"I don't think I could respect a mistress that was either black or yellow, God forgive me !" said Mrs. Barwell. "Not but what I've seen foreigners as far away as Boolong that was a moderate wholesome color—for foreigners, of course ; but most of them have a lampblack complexion, and the rest look as if they were uncommon slow in getting rid of a bad attack of the jaundice. A duck's foot isn't a pleasant object for a gentleman to have before his eyes for a constancy. You've set your hopes of happiness on something softer than saffron in color, Master Julian ?"

"She is a good English girl, Mrs. Barwell," said he.

"Thank God for that—thank God for that !" cried the housekeeper piously.

"Yes, she is a good English girl—that is, Australian."
Mrs. Barwell's face fell.

"Australian? Ah! Botany Bay was all the talk when I was a slip of a girl. An Australian, did you say, sir? God forbid!"

"She was born in Australia, Mrs. Barwell, but her father and mother were both English. That makes her English, doesn't it?"

"I'd be very cautious who I'd call an Englishman or an Englishwoman. If we weren't very cautious there's no knowing who mightn't claim to be called English—the Cornish folk, perhaps, or the Presbyterians."

"Why, Mrs. Barwell, the Australians are far more English than the English themselves. They keep their hats in their hands while the entire of 'God Save the Queen' is being performed by the band."

"That's a good sign, sir, if the young women are yellow. And may I ask when the happy event is to take place?"

Julian Charlton was silent. The woman repeated her question; but even then there was a long pause before he burst into an unnaturally loud laugh, saying:

"When? Why, we are married already, Mrs. Barwell."

"What! Married already, sir? And not a word about it among the obituaries in the *Times*, sir—not a word about it even in the *Brackenshire Chronicle*? I don't like that, sir. It doesn't seem altogether square when a Charlton of Brackenhurst Court gets married without it appearing among the obituaries in the *Times* or to the length of a column, maybe, in the *Chronicle*."

"I am sorry you don't like it, Mrs. Barwell. If I had thought that you wouldn't be pleased—but there! it's too late now."

"And where did it happen, sir?" the housekeeper asked as if she were alluding to an accident.

"Where? Why, in Australia, to be sure. Where else should it happen?"

"Then they have a sort of marriage there—they don't

live altogether promiskiss like? Anyhow, to make sure, I'd have it performed again by the Reverend Mr. Loftus, or maybe the lord bishop himself, in your own church. You didn't leave her in Australia, sir?"

"She is in London, Mrs. Barwell, and she will remain there for a week or two yet. Then—perhaps we may go abroad for a month or so; nothing is settled yet."

"If you had but given us a day's notice we could have had the best bedroom ready for you both"—Julian Charlton gave a little gasp, his face flamed like a girl's, and then a curious coldness seized him—"but you didn't even say that there was a mistress coming—" He gave another gasp.

"Never mind, Mrs. Barwell," said he, rising quickly. "It is necessary for us to be in London for some weeks at least. That will give you plenty of time to prepare for us."

"Plenty, indeed, sir," said the housekeeper, going to the door. "And I'm sure I wish you every happiness, sir, if it's not too late."

"It's never too late to wish a man happiness—not even when he is married," said Julian, with a laugh.

"And I know that she should be a happy lady this day—unless you have changed a good deal during your travels, sir. The Charltons have always been good husbands—there has never been anything loose in their way of living, and every Charlton has had a group of at least six bridesmaids, and groomsmen to match at the other side. I do hope that I may announce that you had at least six couples behind you at the church, sir."

"You may say nine if you please—that will be on the safe side," laughed Julian.

Mrs. Barwell did not laugh. On the contrary, she was very solemn as she opened the door, made a housekeeper's courtesy, and disappeared into the dim-lighted hall.

He gave a sigh of relief.

When a man has been for about thirty years accustomed to be strictly accurate in his speech, and never even to suggest a falsehood, he has always more or less difficulty in accommodating himself to a different course of life. It is not so easy becoming a liar as people generally suppose. Julian Charlton was but a beginner—a clumsy amateur at an art in which even the cleverest of mankind have failed to perfect themselves, in spite of almost constant practice in its higher branches.

All points considered, he was to be pardoned those little gasps of his now and again—for those inartistic little pauses when he should have been glib—for that little sigh of relief when he was released.

Even the most exacting critic might have pardoned him. He wanted practice.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE ART OF SINGING.

THE house in Chelsea to which Julian Charlton was driven on the next evening was a modest one, not far from the hospital. On the iron gate giving one access to a garden, twenty feet by fifteen, there was a brass plate bearing the inscription :

THE CARNISOLIST SOCIETY,
Matthew Hardy, Secretary.

This scarcely looked like the house which a young woman having an income of between ten and twelve thousand pounds a year would be likely to choose as a permanent residence in London. If these were the headquarters of the carnisolists he should judge that the society had not yet reached a position that commanded the attention of the opulent.

As he knocked he reflected upon the possibility of the finances of the society being suddenly placed on a more satisfactory basis through the incident of the secretary's niece coming to reside at the headquarters of the carnisolists.

But this conjecture and every other one was sent to the winds when he became aware of the fact that a duet was being sung within the house—a duet for a very unmanageable bass and a very sympathetic soprano.

He had never heard Bertha sing, but he knew in an instant that the soprano was hers. He had never heard Vicars sing, but he had a settled conviction that the unruly bass was his.

The voices went on while he waited impatiently outside the door. Clearly the attendance of the servants at the bureau of the carnisologists left a good deal to be desired.

He knocked a second time.

The voices went on inside, and the bass was more demonstrative than ever.

He knocked a third time with a force that threatened the panel of the door.

A face appeared at a window to the left, the head craning round as far as possible. After another interval, the door was opened by a rather battered female servant.

"Did you knock more than once?" she inquired affably when Julian reached the door mat.

"I knocked three times," he replied, hardly so affably.

"I thort sow," said the girl; "I didn't 'ear yow for the noise," and she made a motion with her elbow toward a door to the right; beyond that door the startling duet was being sung.

The servant knocked at the door as a matter of form, and almost at the same instant turned the handle.

The duet came to an abrupt close, as he entered the room and found himself face to face with Bertha, who had just risen from the piano, and Eric Vicars, who was standing by her side.

Her face lightened up as she gave her hand to her lover without a word.

Mr. Vicars laughed loudly, wiping his moist forehead with the cuff of his coat. Then his hand went out with a flash to Julian, and remained extended until—the interval was considerable—Julian discovered it was there.

"We were having one of the old songs together," said Vicars in his hearty style. "It is one of the real bush songs. You heard the Coo-ee chorus, I expect. We do *the Coo-ee* pretty well together, I think. It's a real

bush song that, and it does bring back the wild life to a chap."

"I can hardly doubt it," said Julian.

"Why, I taught it to Bertha when she wasn't higher than that table," continued the ex-overseer. "She came up for a spell to our run with the poor old dad. Ah, we had a time of it, my girl! Bless me, how that song did bring it all back to me. It did me good; my eyes got a bit watery at times here and there." He turned away his head for a moment, and Julian saw the back of his arm moving to and fro on a level with his eyes. "It's nothing to be ashamed of," continued Mr. Vicars, turning round once more, as if he had made up his mind to be a man. "I'm not ashamed, if my eyes did become moist."

"There is no reason to be so," said Julian. "No, not even if the moisture extended to your forehead, as it seems to have done."

"Poor Eric sings with all his heart; he has a large heart," remarked Bertha, smiling.

"Who wouldn't sing with one's heart when you are joining in?" cried Eric. "It's a real bush song that—the sound of the stock whip is in every line, I tell you. Bertha is the pretty daughter of the squatter, you see, mister, and I'm the overseer that's in love with her on the sly." Here he laughed loud and long and looked as sly as any man of the stalwart, frank, straightforward type could look. For a man with so large a heart he was wonderfully successful in simulating slyness. "The story of the song—that's what I'm explaining, mind—only the story of the song. To be sure, Bertha was the pretty daughter of a squatter, and I did a little in the overseeing line—that doesn't interfere with the story of the song—dear me, no! Let us try over the Coo-ee once more, Bertha. It comes in, mister, when the lover wants to signal to the girl that he's waiting for her among the blue gums. Oh, it's a real bush song

and no mistake. Lord, how it brings back the old time!"

What was Mr. Charlton to say in reply to this exuberance—the exuberance of a schoolboy with overflowing spirits?

He said nothing; he only looked at Bertha. She was the same as ever, although surrounded by the horrible types of furniture that were produced during the early years of the queen's reign. The Windsor chair, the couch with a hump, the vulgar mahogany sideboard with much of the veneer peeled away—these were the most prominent objects in the room. The pictures were German prints of the Empress Eugénie, the queen and the prince consort, and her Majesty handing a Bible to the amazed nondescript barbaric chief, assuring him that it was the secret of England's greatness.

In spite of all she was exquisite.

But what could he say to her with that big brute standing at her elbow?

"You did not find that your home was in ashes?" said she. "That is what the returned wanderer in stories usually does, when he has set all his expectations on seeing his home once again."

"The only ashes were those of the logs in the fireplace," said he. "They had made a fire for me, feeling sure that I would appreciate it."

"And you sat once more by your own fireside?"

"On the contrary, I strolled away through the grounds. I heard the blackbirds, the rooks, the cuckoos."

"And you felt that you had everything to make your home happy?"

"Not quite, not quite."

She looked into his face and understood him.

"I wonder what I shall think of your blackbirds—what I *shall think of your cuckoos*," said she.

"My word, Bertha," interposed Vicars, "you will find yourself longing for the scream of a cockatoo, for the yell of the lory. Give me a real bird in the bush."

"I prefer the one in the hand," said Bertha.

"There's not an English bird that isn't a poor sort of cheeper compared with ours. Did you ever hear a real sulphur cockatoo in its own woods, mister?"

"Not exactly," said Charlton; "but I have heard a bushman sing."

Bertha burst into a ringing laugh.

Mr. Vicars did not—for a few moments. Then he made up in the loudness of his laughter for the time he had remained silent.

"You had me there, mister, I allow. Well, I dare say I am a bit loud, and maybe harsh too, but what does that matter if your heart's in the right place? There's no one here—or elsewhere, for that matter—that won't allow that my heart's in the right place. Eh, Bertha?"

"Poor old Eric!" said Bertha. "Everyone who knows you will allow that, I'm certain, even though you do threaten to bring the roof down when you sing."

"What do you say to that?" cried Eric proudly, with a wave of his arm in the direction of Julian.

"I have never heard," said Julian quietly, "that vocal incapacity was an evidence of cardiac disorder. But I assure you I had no intention of criticising your—singing."

"No? Then I accept your apology in the spirit it is offered in," cried Eric, flashing out his hand once again for Julian to grasp.

"My dear sir, you are under some strange misapprehension," said the latter. "There's no question of apology under discussion, though I am always pleased to shake hands with anyone whose heart is in the right place."

He merely touched the man's hand with his fingers, so

that Eric grasped a handful of air with his usual heartiness. Julian had turned his back on him and was talking to Bertha before the ex-overseer had quite recovered from a course of treatment to which he was not accustomed. Hitherto he had always been the rude man—what is the good of having your heart in the right place unless it admits of your being rude with impunity? Here, however, was a man who, without enjoying a reputation for having his heart in the right place, claimed the privilege of being extremely offensive! Eric Vicars was certainly not accustomed to this sort of thing.

Neither was he accustomed to be in the room with Bertha while another man was talking to her, and in a low, exclusive tone of voice.

He only wished that he had a chance of meeting that fellow with the slim figure and the fashionably cut coat in the neighborhood of the stockyard while the cattle were being driven in. He might cut a dash among the swells—perhaps he was a masher, or maybe a Johnnie—in London, but what a fool he would be with a stock whip! His honest heart was filled with a sense of his own superiority, if it came to a question of driving cattle. And yet here was this fellow Charlton, who knew nothing whatever about cattle driving, actually insulting him, Eric, who was a complete master of the arts of driving and branding and horning! The thing was simply monstrous.

He looked out of the window and began to whistle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE BEAST.

HE was rewarded by the sight of a four-wheeler at the door. Mr. Hardy and his wife stepped out, and when the maidservant found time to answer their knock they entered the room.

Eric smiled to observe the expression on Charlton's face as he was greeted by the secretary of the carnisolists. He smiled more broadly still as Mr. Hardy began a disquisition on the subject of the new cult, which involved total abstinence from all forms of food except flesh meat.

"I hope I may count on your becoming a member, Mr. Charlton," said the secretary. "All that we want now is an increase in membership and plenty of life members with the privilege of signing oneself V. I. C. T. I. M."

"Victim," said Bertha, with a laugh.

"V. I. C. T. I. M.," continued Mr. Hardy, ignoring her interruption. "That is, I need hardly say, Vice-Integral Carnisolist To Improve Mankind. Let me make out a receipt for your life subscription, sir? We want intelligent men badly."

"Not a doubt of it," said Bertha.

"I am afraid that all the contribution of this nature that I could offer you would not materially add to your resources, Mr. Hardy," said Charlton.

"Twenty-five guineas, Mr. Charlton, is still something," said the secretary.

"That is money, not intelligence," remarked Julian.

Mr. Hardy looked really puzzled, as persons do when they are trying to master some subtle theological distinction, involving fine hair splitting.

"Money—intelligence"—he shook his head. "Intelligence—money"—reversed it seemed equally puzzling to him. "I fear I did not make myself plain to you," said he. "We want intelligence—that is, life members; any man who becomes a member proves himself to be thoroughly intelligent, just as the man who joins the Church to which you belong proves himself to be orthodox. I'm sorry to say that there are few really intelligent men in London. I thought I had secured five a fortnight ago. I was mistaken: they did not pay their subscriptions. Butchers are not generally regarded by the rest of mankind as among the most intelligent of persons, and yet the Carnisolist Society has established the fact that there are no more intelligent men than butchers and stock raisers. Nearly all our members belong to these classes. I cannot understand how anyone can doubt that we have Scripture on our side. A careful study of the sacred word reveals that there are countless texts in favor of our principles. If you only read with the object of proving your point, it's wonderful how much evidence you can find in the Bible to back you up. It's a wonderful book, Mr. Charlton. If there is one injunction that it lays down as more incumbent on mankind than another, it is on the subject of eating animal food. Our members—the butchers and the stock raisers—are strongly impressed with this truth; they conscientiously believe that all other forms of food are delusive, not to say unscriptural. You have heard of the Beast, Mr. Charlton?"

"Several," said Charlton. "What particular animal do you allude to?"

"St. John's Beast, the Beast in Revelation—well, that, we are assured, typifies Vegetarianism."

"The Beast—Vegetarianism? The Beast seems rather an unfortunate type of the principles of Vegetarianism, Mr. Hardy."

"It seems so at first, Mr. Charlton. But a little study of

what can be done in interpretation will convince you, I am sure, that frequently the best types are those that seem to suggest just the opposite of what they really mean. That induces people to search out the hidden meanings for themselves. The Book of the Revelation is so called because it conceals everything; therefore, on the same principle, the Beast is Vegetarianism. You will become a life member, Mr. Charlton?"

"I shall have to think over it, Mr. Hardy," said Charlton, brushing the edge of his hat with his sleeve, preparatory to departing.

"Will you not stay and have some tea with us?" said Mrs. Hardy. "We dined early to-day: Mr. Hardy has accustomed himself to do so; but we shall have tea in half an hour."

"I am sorry that I have an engagement," said Charlton. "Indeed, I am almost late for it now. I must say good-by."

He was outside the door of the room in a moment, Bertha by his side.

"Dearest," he whispered, "you cannot remain among such surroundings. Come away with me now."

"That would be impossible," she replied. "It is a shocking house—it makes me quite ill. My aunt says it is extremely good for London; they are all the same, she says, no matter what money you may have to spend. She will not spend a penny of what I allow her as directed by my father's will. Poor Uncle Matthew is madder than ever."

"Good Heavens, you cannot stay here, Bertha!"

"I have made up my mind to it, dearest—for a month at any rate. I want you to be certain, quite certain, that you have done what is right in making that promise to me."

"I have only to look at you here in the midst of this squalor—in the midst of this insanity and vulgarity, to feel

that I should be doing what is right in taking you without the delay of a moment."

"It cannot be, dearest," she said, shaking her head. "I want you to be quite certain—as I am. You have not been thinking as I have on this matter. Perhaps even when I was sitting alone last night you came to the conclusion that I was wrong and that you were right."

He looked at her without a word for some moments.

"I came to the conclusion that you are part of my life," said he after a pause. "Apart from you my life would miserably incomplete. Let me take you away at once."

"I will be here to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that, and you can be with me every day, and show me if London is really so very much finer than Sydney; so far I prefer Sydney."

"Then if you are dressed and waiting for me here at one o'clock to-morrow, I shall come for you and show you something of the place, leaving you here once more in the evening."

"That will be delightful," said she. "Do not come before one o'clock—my dresses are promised for noon, and it will take me quite an hour dressing."

"I will say half-past one—that will give you some margin. For Heaven's sake do not hurry in your dressing, dearest."

"You needn't impress that on me," she cried, with sparkling eyes. "I know what it means to be properly dressed in London. An open carriage stopped near us where we were blocked on our way here. It contained an elderly lady with a very thin nose, and two younger ones, each with a nose exactly like their mother's. They wore——"

"Thank you," said Julian, who had now fully recovered his spirits. "I dine at eight, and it is now just seven. I won't ask you to compress your description into so ridiculously short a space as an hour. Good-by, dearest—rather *au revoir*."

He put his hand at the back of her shapely head and kissed her on the mouth.

At the same instant there came from the two-inch open space of a door to the right a gurgling laugh.

He became aware of the fact that the handmaiden of the house had concealed herself behind that door for the purpose of hearing and seeing all that took place between Miss Lancaster and, as the girl would probably say, in describing the scene at some future date, her young man.

He would, he reflected, become known in the row of houses, before the week was out, as Miss Lancaster's young man.

The reflection was not a pleasing one.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON A SHOW.

HE slept at his club, after going to the Lyceum, and appeared at half-past one the next day at the house in Chelsea. This time he was not greeted with sounds such as came from the thorax of the ex-overseer.

She met him in the narrow strip of hall. The moment he saw her his critical glance assured him that she might meet without trepidation the best dressed woman in London. He believed her to be the best dressed woman in London, and, what was nearly as important, the best looking as well.

She was radiant as she got into his hansom. When they drove through Sloane Street he said, "Now we are entering London."

She caught his hand as they swept into Knightsbridge and the hansom pulled up suddenly, as three soldiers trotted up on black horses. The soldiers wore helmets with plumes, and sparkling cuirasses. Behind them at some distance she had a vision of a glittering fast-flowing stream—helmets, cuirasses, sabers, all glittering gloriously in the spring sunlight. On either side of the space cleared in the center of the road was an open line of tall soldiers wearing bearskins, rigidly presenting arms. It seemed to Bertha that the lines were continued for about a mile on either hand.

"I quite forgot," said Julian; "the Emperor of Morocco arrived to-day; he will probably be in the carriage with the prince. Yes, here come the Guards."

The great glittering stream of soldiers swept up before her eyes. Then the men in the crowd took off their hats, and a great cheer arose as the carriage with four horses and

outriders approached. An officer, splendidly mounted, was on either side. In the carriage was the Emperor of Morocco glittering with jewels, and by his side, in the uniform of the Morocco Chasseurs, of which, it is scarcely necessary to say, he is colonel, was the prince. Behind the carriage rode the staff officers, their plumes flying behind them. Then came about a dozen more carriages, and Julian told her the names of the occupants of each. The mounted policeman gave the signal for the traffic to be resumed, and the hansom dashed ahead.

"This is London," whispered Bertha. "I admit it: it is better even than Sydney."

He drove to a restaurant in Piccadilly, where they lunched. Then they walked together to Burlington House. It was the private view day at the academy. He had obtained two tickets from one of his friends the previous evening.

"Why," said Bertha, "it is like a photographer's window at Sydney, only here all the celebrities are alive. I seem to know every one."

They were in the sculpture gallery. Around them were the fashionable actors, novelists—most modest of men—clergymen—all with gaiters, and some with aprons to keep their clothes from being stained by contact with the world—statesmen—they seemed to her but a feeble folk—judges—they looked jovial rather than judicial. Most interesting of all was the burlesque actress, whom a duke had married so soon as her own husband, who was a bookbinder, had got a divorce from her. Everyone looked at the painted face, the golden tresses, and the trained smile of her Grace—even the clergymen in aprons fingered their gold eyeglasses nervously, and, as she stood before them, showed no disposition for several moments to criticise the other works of art around her. The youthful duke looked vastly proud of his purchase. He was a duke, so could not hope to do anything *particular in the world*; but it was universally admitted that

he had made an admirable co-respondent. His wife remained on the stage, and danced in a costume the tendency of which was certainly not to conceal her charms, and her manager, as he counted his profits, declared that, as an auxiliary to the dramatic appreciation of the public of Great Britain, the divorce court had its place among the institutions of the country.

Another peer of the realm, whose father had been Lord High Chancellor—his enemies said he had been the best keeper of the queen's conscience ever known for the simple reason that he had none of his own to look after—was a noticeable object as he shook hands with the duchess.

"*Altissima Peto*" was the motto of his family, which he adapted to his daily life by wearing the highest collars in London.

Another gentleman who spoke to her grace was the son of an Irish judge. His grandfather had, however, been a respectable man.

Bertha looked around at the most resplendent of the visitors.

"I knew that we were coming to an exhibition of paintings," she whispered, "but I——"

"Celebrities among women are appalling," said Julian. "It is the women whose husbands are celebrated that are nice."

He pointed out to her some of the fresh, graceful girls who are to be seen at every function in England, and she looked with admiration upon them and their toilets.

The crowds were very animated.

Now and again, too, when they had a moment to spare, they looked at the pictures and yawned.

They seemed to think that the place would have been very nice if it were not for the pictures.

It did not take Julian Charlton long to perceive that *Bertha* was attracting a large amount of attention. He

could see that she was admired on every side. Bertha, of course, being a woman, would have remained in ignorance of this fact if he had not told her of it.

He told her that he expected she would create a distinct impression upon the personages of the world. It was on this account he had brought her into the midst of the most notable society in the world. But he assured her that she had produced a far greater impression than he had anticipated.

She gave no sign of displeasure. On the contrary, she laughed, and declared that she had felt, the instant she had seen her new frocks, that the young lady whom Mme. John Smith of Regent Street had sent to her in reply to her telegram was a thorough artist.

"There is no satisfaction in the world like feeling that one is well dressed," said she. "And there is no one better dressed than I am."

In the course of half an hour the associate from whom Julian had got his tickets came up and greeted his friend. Julian presented him to Bertha, and he inquired how it was that he had never met Miss Lancaster before.

"You have set us all wondering, Miss Lancaster," said he, assuming the air of an associate of fashion rather than of a narrow-minded corporation such as the academy. "You have quite put in the shade Carpenter's 'A Morsel for a Monarch.' Half an hour ago we were all talking about the picture, now we have all been talking about you. You have made an implacable enemy of Carpenter."

"I am nobody," said she. "I am a colonial nonentity, paying my first visit to home—we all call England home in Australia. I saw one of your pictures in the Sydney gallery. There is no picture more admired in the colony."

The painter thought he had never seen a more charming girl in all his life.

"Mr. Charlton has just shown me your new one—'Where

the Wild Asses do Quench their Thirst'—and I have made up my mind that I shall buy it and send it out to Sydney as a gift. It is far better even than your 'Journey to Eschol.' Do you not think so?"

"I never think about my own works, Miss Lancaster," said he. "It is quite bad enough to have to paint them."

"You will sell it to me, though? Surely you will not refuse me?"

"I really have not the heart," said he. "You plead for that privilege in a way that it is impossible to resist. I must send a message to the secretary to say that it is sold. It would be awkward if it were to be sold three or four times over."

"It would," said Charlton. "So far as I can gather that calamity has never befallen any of your previous works. It is better to sell three of them once over than one of them three times over. Isn't that so?"

"Miss Lancaster, I appreciate your judgment the more, now that I know it has not been influenced by Charlton," said the associate. "I hope you are really in earnest about the picture. I have a wife and two children: they want bread."

"Of course I am in earnest," said Bertha. "I only hope that you are not raising my expectations of getting the picture, only to dash them to the ground. You will let me have it?"

"And Miss Lancaster will give you five shillings in hand to lay out in loaves, which you can carry home in a red cotton handkerchief to keep starvation from the studio door until Monday," said Charlton.

Before another half hour had passed it was known throughout the galleries that "Where the Wild Asses do Quench their Thirst" had been sold to the beautiful girl, whose presence at the private view had almost eclipsed in interest that of the lady who had entered the peerage through the door of the divorce court.

There was quite a flutter among some of the most antique of the academicians at the intelligence. She might have had the entire body presented to her had she been so minded.

As it was, she had quite a number of the best known men in England presented to her; for it was surprising how many old friends of Charlton's turned up in the course of a short time—most of them painters. The interest they displayed in the progress of art in the colonies—Sydney especially—could not have been otherwise than extremely gratifying to Miss Lancaster.

The three evening papers which contained society paragraphs announced the purchase of "Where the Wild Asses do Quench their Thirst."

The first stated that it had been bought by Miss La Castra, the daughter of a well-known American millionaire of Spanish extraction.

The second mentioned that the widow of a Lancashire merchant had bought the work of the rising associate.

The third said it was an open secret that the picture had been sold to Miss Sydney for presentation to the fine art museum which was in course of formation at Lancaster. Miss Sydney, it added, was the only daughter of one of the most highly respected merchants in the town which was about to benefit by her munificence.

Every day during the next week Charlton called at the house at Chelsea, and carried Bertha away with him. He never entered the house, nor did he inquire what were the views of Mrs. Hardy on the subject of the propriety of Bertha's daily disappearance with himself. He was not greatly concerned to learn what were the views of Mrs. Hardy on any subject. He was equally indifferent in respect of Mr. Vicars' opinion; and Bertha did not think it necessary to tell him that Mr. Vicars had, on the second day after her arrival in England, laid his childlike, but unusually large heart at her feet, and that, on being informed that she could

not accept his gift, the ex-overseer had put himself on *régime* of the steadiest drinking that he had yet subjected himself to in the course of a somewhat checkered career in England and the colonies.

Nothing occurred to mar the happiness of this week, so far as Julian Charlton was concerned. He took her everywhere—even to the Tower.

He had become fully reconciled to the idea that he was married to her. Only he could not suggest to her the propriety—this is not exactly the word that was in his mind—of naming the day when she would cease to live at the house in Chelsea and come to the shelter of his great love for her. It certainly requires some delicacy on the part of a man situated as he was to make any suggestion on such a point. But he had now no misgiving as to the result of the adoption of her principles regarding the nature of marriage and the sacredness of the bond. Of course it would not do for all the world to adopt these principles; for, unfortunately, all the world could not know what it was to love as he and Bertha loved.

He had too much delicacy even to suggest to Bertha the pleasure it would give him if she would allow him to take her for a day to Brackenhurst Court. The suggestion came from her one day when he had been telling her how he had sat in his great drawing room thinking of her.

"I should so much like to see the place," said she.

"You can do so to-morrow," cried he. "We can leave Waterloo at 12.25 and be at the Court to lunch at three o'clock, returning to town by the train leaving Brackenhurst at six. Why should we not carry out this programme?"

"Why not?" said she.

"Then it is settled," said he.

They went down to Brackenhurst by the 12.25 train the next day.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON A FINE DAY.

NOW and again, at intervals of some years, it happens that the month of May in England contains a fine day; but even the oldest inhabitant of Brackenhurst, who remembered when England had a climate—when the summer, according to the account daily given by the oldest inhabitant, consisted of six months of more than tropical heat, and the winter of six months of more than arctic snow and ice—failed to recall a May that opened with such promise as that which greeted Bertha's arrival in England.

When the picturesque little station of Brackenhurst was reached, and the train had rushed on into the distance of cuttings and tunnels, leaving the girl by the side of Charlton among the scarlet runners and the red geraniums that bordered the platform, a blackbird appeared on a thorn bush that was giving an indication of the coming flower, and burst into song. A lark fluttered upward from the meadow beneath, and soared through the whiff of smoke left by the engine, and when a moment of silence came the voice of the cuckoo sounded through the distance.

"England! England! home! home!" cried the girl with her eyes full of tears; "I know it now. I have always wondered what it meant—that talk of the newly arrived people at our station—that talk of the hedgerows, the birds' songs, the scent of the hawthorn. I know now what it all means. It means home."

"And you will soon be at home, dearest," said Julian. "The dogcart is waiting for us."

The drive to Brackenhurst village, which was three miles

from Brackenhurst railway station, and on to Brackenhurst Court, which was a mile from Brackenhurst village, was the most delightful experience Bertha had ever undergone. The fields, covered over with the tender shoots of corn, the thick hedgerows, the silvery stream flowing down to the water wheel of an old mill, the church tower rendered shapeless in its forest of ivy, the forge at the crossroads—all were a delight to the girl fresh from Australia. She clapped her hands and laughed like a schoolgirl newly emancipated.

The groom, sitting behind with rigid arms, hoped that she would not be seen by any person who was given to gossip—the rector, for instance. If her demonstrations were to become the subject of comment in the neighborhood he felt that he would never again be able to impart the regulation amount of rigidity to his arms behind her.

The only one of all the spring's delights which she was disposed to rate very low was the meadow with the sheep and young lambs which Julian pointed out to her.

"Sheep," said she, with a suspicion of contempt in her voice—"there's nothing particular about sheep."

He laughed.

"I forgot," he said; "sheep are by no means uncommon in Australia."

Through the gates, and past the ivied lodge, with the old man in corduroys, and the old lady in a red shawl, making their courtesies at the door, the dogcart was driven, until, after about a mile of avenue, from which many a glimpse of deer wandering through the park was afforded Bertha, the imposing front of the Court came in sight.

The avenue made a long sweep round by the terraces, so that every part of the mansion might be seen by anyone driving to the door.

Bertha felt that the happiness of this happy day could not be exceeded, as she eagerly scanned the many symmetrical *features of the Court*.

Before he pulled up at the porch Julian said to her in French:

"In order to save trouble, dearest, I told the housekeeper that you were my wife. You must not start when she addresses you as 'madam.' "

"You were quite right," said she with only a little flush upon her face. "If I were not your wife could I be here to-day?"

She made a complete conquest of Mrs. Barwell, whom she suffered to lead her into various rooms, after she had laid off her hat, explaining the purport of each. The light French furniture in the boudoir overlooking the lawns had been uncovered, and the silk hangings replaced. The old housekeeper hoped that madam was pleased with the appearance of the room, and madam declared that she had never been in a more charming apartment—it was faultless.

Then Mrs. Barwell showed her that interesting apartment known as the still-room, and Bertha expressed herself greatly pleased, especially with the appearance of last year's pickled walnuts. At the end of the corridor a door was thrown open disclosing a spacious room with an iron grating in front of the fire, and iron bars across the lower windows.

"This is the day nursery, madam," said the housekeeper; "but if you think a southern aspect is better, we can easily prepare one of the bedrooms in the other wing."

She spoke in an unctuous whisper, and with infinite solemnity.

Bertha said she was sure that the room was a very nice one, and she thought that perhaps Mr. Charlton might be waiting for her downstairs.

She hurried away, leaving the housekeeper to close the doors, which she did, smiling all the time in a way that was full of subtle meaning.

"My beloved—my beloved!" cried Julian, putting his arm around her as he met her at the foot of the staircase

and led her into the drawing room; "nothing here is worthy of you. You glorify everything by your presence."

She gave herself to his arms and looked up to his face.

"I feel that I have reached a new and lovelier world," said she, as they seated themselves on a little couch that was made to hold only one in its chaste embrace—it was, however, quite capacious enough for them at this moment. "I feel that I am simply recalling the incidents in some book of English life which I have read long ago. 'Too passing sweet to be substantial'—that is the line which has come to my mind often since we heard the blackbird welcoming us."

"My best beloved," he whispered, "I shall live for you. I shall live to make you happy."

"You have done so already," she said. "My heart is full of content. My soul has found its husband-soul. Life can give us nothing better than this."

The sound of the gong separated them.

The lunch was as graceful as the best they had partaken of during the past week in Piccadilly, and the white Burgundy was far better than any wine they had had.

He drank to her across the table, "Welcome to the Court," and she replied with love in her eyes.

He brought her out to the terrace and they sat together on one of the garden seats, listening to the music of the woodland, of the shrubberies, of the gardens. The world seemed full of music to this girl, who had never known anything in nature more musical than the Australian bush. The soft sunshine, the songs of the thrush and the blackbird, the drowsy cawing of the rooks, the sweet smell of the grass of the lawns and of the myriad primroses of the terraces mingled and became to her as the expression of a joy, the existence of which had never suggested itself to her.

He was a part of this joy—he in whose hand she had laid her own. She could not fancy the song of the thrush being *heard without the scent* of the primroses coming to her. She

could not fancy the love of the spring day without the hand in which her own reposed.

Like a knell to her happiness came the sudden sound of the church clock in the distance striking the hour.

Julian quickly pulled out his watch. He found that the clock was only twenty minutes astray, which was marvelous for a church clock. It was, however, slow. The dogcart would be at the door in ten minutes to take them to the train.

"Ah," said the girl when he told her what the hour was, "Chelsea knows no pleasure like this."

He looked at her with eyes overflowing with tenderness as she was about to rise. He held her hand tightly in his own, keeping her in her place. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

What was in his heart? Did she understand something of it, by the aid of that subtle soul communion existing between them?

Why should her face flush suddenly? Why did her hand tremble? and, above all, why on earth should there be a sigh struggling in her throat?

For purely spiritual lovers such expressions of emotion were remarkable.

Alas! even the soul of a man and woman becomes part of the springtime. They look upon the things of nature beneath their eyes, and criticise them from a superior height, forgetful of the fact that they are but a part of the things around them. The strong life that beats in everything beneath their eyes pulsates within them quite as vehemently. There is no shutting out the influence of the spring. It throbs through all nature, and the soul of a man and a woman is part of nature, and submissive to nature's schemes to effect her own purpose.

Her little sigh scarcely managed to struggle forth.

He dropped her hand, and got upon his feet, saying in a *low voice*:

"For God's sake, Bertha, find your hat."

The imploration might strike some people as being ridiculously earnest.

We do not ask our wives and sisters for God's sake to complete their toilets when we are going to drive them to a railway station. But to Bertha it did not seem at all ridiculous that he should so implore of her to put on her hat.

She was in the hall in a moment and running upstairs.

"Ah, what a pity it is that you must go, madam," said the housekeeper. "Why should you go back to the smoke and the noise of London town?"

"We must go back at once, Mrs. Barwell," said the girl. "But I shall take back with me the recollection of the songs of your birds—oh, such songs!"

"Ah, these are only the riff-raff of birds that you heard to-day," said Mrs. Barwell. "They are only the blackbirds and the throistles. They are with us always; but last night, if you had been at this window, as I was, and had heard the first nightingale that has come to us, you would not talk about such fowl as them outside."

"Was it lovelier than the blackbird, Mrs. Barwell?"

"Everybody to their own tastes in the matter of birds, my young lady—meaning madam—ma'am, but nobody that has an ear to hear would mention the nightingale in the same breath with the others. What a pity it is that you can't tarry to hear the nightingale, madam."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the girl in a way that frightened the housekeeper. "I could not hear it—I dare not. Oh, why is it that to be a woman is to be weak—miserably weak? I could not hear the nightingale. And yet, ah, I should like to hear it above anything in the world."

She threw herself into a chair and buried her face in her hands. Mrs. Barwell looked at the lovely young creature with an expression which was at first one of amazement, but *which soon softened* into one of matronly superiority. An

illustrative smile accompanied the expression, as she murmured:

"They do have their fancies, the poor young things! May, April, March, February. Does it take so long to come from Australia, I wonder?" Then she turned to Bertha, whispering with infinite confidentiality, "When was it you said you were married, my dear? Not later than February, surely."

The girl started.

"Oh, do not talk to me about nightingales and marriage, and such things," she cried. Then she gave a laugh that was not quite a laugh, and throwing her arms around the good old housekeeper, kissed her upon the cheek. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Barwell," she said; "but I don't think I quite understand myself. It has been such a strange day altogether. Oh, I wonder do people ever go mad listening to the songs of those birds. Listen, you can hear them even yet now that the window is open."

Again the smile of matronly superiority overspread the countenance of the housekeeper.

"Your lips are too hot to be wholesome, if I may say it, my young madam," said she. "You would be all the better for tarrying here the night; to be sure these fancies do come and go; we must be prepared for them. Did you say it was in February? maybe March at the nearest."

"The dogcart is at the porch," cried Bertha. "He said there was scarcely time to catch the train. Good-by, Mrs. Barwell; I am all right. I shall come and visit you again very soon, and look at—at those lovely—lovely—pickled walnuts."

With another curious laugh that had something hysterical in its tone she flashed to the door with radiant cheeks and sparkling eyes, and was seated by the side of Julian in the dogcart before the housekeeper had recovered from her surprise, and had ceased murmuring plaintively: "Pickled wal-

nuts! lovely pickled walnuts! What could the poor young thing mean? Well, she's flesh and blood, and as hands as if she had been English born and bred. Only—pickled walnuts. What could she mean, anyway?"

It is not surprising that Mrs. Barwell did not understand the girl.

The girl did not understand herself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON PROVIDENCE AND THE FIEND.

"WE can do it, Carson?" said Julian to the groom as he put the horse to its pace down the avenue.

"We'll do it easy, sir," the man replied. "The train is never just punctual, sir. I've seen it as much as five minutes behind. We'll have over two minutes to wait at the station, sir."

"Of course we'll do it," muttered Julian.

The horse was a fine half-bred chestnut. It did not need any urging. It went with a great stride down the avenue to the lodge gate.

The gate was closed.

"What is that man about?" cried Julian when he perceived that the gate was closed. "Why the deuce does he not open the gate?"

The groom got to his feet and sent out a long "halloa" over the heads of the occupants of the front seat. Julian joined his voice with that of the groom.

Neither the highly picturesque old man with the corduroys nor the highly picturesque old woman with the red shawl whom Bertha had admired so greatly approached the gate to open it.

The groom swung himself to the ground the moment his master slackened the pace of the horse, and ran ahead to the double gate. He turned the handle and gave a tug to the gate, thinking to swing it wide in a moment.

It did not move.

He set his boot against the other wing and gave a second tug.

The gate quivered, but remained fast.

The groom scrutinized the lock.

"It's bolted, sir, sure enough," said he, running to the lodge.

The lodge door was not locked. The groom disappeared within, and in a moment his voice was heard shouting through the lodge for Jonas Ferrar, who, as Julian explained to Bertha, was the picturesque lodge keeper. Then came the sound of the banging of cupboards and table drawers, the upsetting of chairs and, following each such sound, a very barbarous oath from the groom.

"Take the reins for a moment, Bertha," said Julian, preparing to dismount.

While his foot was on the iron stirrup the groom reappeared with a key in his hand.

"There's not a damned soul—I beg your pardon, sir—being so long without a regular master, sir, I'm a bit wild in my speech—not a dam—— Oh, the old fool is away, and this is the only key in the lodge, sir."

The man was already fumbling with the key at the lock.

"That's not the key," said Julian. "What did Jonas mean by going off and leaving no one in charge of the lodge?"

"I suppose he has got into the habit for the two years past, sir," said the groom. "Not a sign of a d—— Oh, we've all got into bad habits, sir."

Julian jumped down and ran into the lodge.

He saw in a moment that whatever chance there might have been originally of his laying his hand upon the key, there was none now. The groom had overturned everything in the room. Being a man, however, Mr. Charlton kicked about the fallen chairs and the cupboard drawers, swearing pretty freely all the time against the picturesque lodge keeper and his wife.

The groom swore with subdued vehemence, now that his master had accepted this duty. The man was too well *trained to claim* an equal footing with his master in this

respect. Besides, he felt that there was no need for both of them to swear. It would serve all practical purposes if one of them did it thoroughly; and his master, soon warming to his work, did it very thoroughly. Being a groom, Carson was something of a connoisseur in swearing, but now he felt that Mr. Charlton was doing the work in a conscientious manner, leaving nothing to be desired.

"What's left for us, Carson? We must catch that train," said Julian.

"The only thing as I see," said the man, "is the Greystone corses."

"Up with you," said Julian, mounting to his place beside Bertha and taking the reins from her.

The horse was showing a strong desire to reach the road by the shortest possible route, which was either through the locked gate or over it. The groom was compelled to go to his head and wheel him round. The man only succeeded by the exercise of great adroitness in regaining his seat behind, for Julian did not lose a second of time in sending the animal forward at a pace that made Bertha seem to be facing a hurricane.

The gate at Greystone corses was a mile away. It was reached by a subsidiary avenue off the principal one. It so happened, however, that during Charlton's absence of two years not more than a dozen people—nine of them poachers—had trodden this particular track. It was overgrown with weeds, so that it was with difficulty Julian was able to keep the dogcart off the borders. At places, too, the darkness made by the meeting of the branches above was overwhelming.

Julian found that he remembered every turn and curve—of which there were many—along the course of the track. He had unlimited confidence in his own steering, and in the speed of the horse. He exchanged no word with Bertha. *He was giving all his attention to the driving.*

The dogcart had gone with a rush into the blackness of darkness beneath the trees where the boughs were thickest with the luxuriance of May.

"Keep your head low," said Julian.

She did so; and the next moment she was thrown forward out of her seat, and would have been on the horse's back had it not been that the groom managed to grasp her dress.

The horse had stopped rigidly.

Julian had been thrown out headlong, but his hands had come upon the right shaft and he was on his feet on the ground in an instant.

"Are you safe?" he cried to Bertha, and she replied, with a reassuring laugh:

"Thanks to Carson, I have not left my seat. What is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter if you are safe," said Julian.

"A tree, sir," said the groom, who had gone to the horse's head. "An old tree has fallen right across the path. Good Lord! if it had been any other horse but Porcupine we should all be lying in a heap just about here. Porcupine's eyes are always to be trusted. Soh, Porky—soh, old chap!"

"Can you put him on the path ahead?" asked Julian.

"With a bit of trouble, sir," replied the man.

Julian lifted Bertha down to the ground in a moment. He could feel that she was not trembling in the least. She, at any rate, had unlimited belief in Providence. The groom backed the horse out of the darkness, and then, putting him on the grass, led him through the trees of the park until the avenue was reached once again.

Julian had not the courage to look at his watch to see whether seven or nine minutes had been lost. He helped Bertha back to her place, and, springing beside her, gave the *chestnut his head*.

In a few minutes the gate was reached. Happily the lodge keeper was on the road exercising a young terrier with a couple of rats, to while away the tedium of a lovely summer evening.

At the sound of the groom's "Halloa!" the second wing of the gate was thrown open, and at last the dogcart was on the straight road for the station.

The hurricane which Bertha had felt upon her face when driving on the avenue now became a tornado. Julian did not touch the horse with the whip. The animal seemed to know what was expected of him. He went ahead with a long stride and his head in the air, and Julian knew that if the train were only ten minutes late at Brackenhurst station the dogcart would be in time.

Two miles of the road were passed when, out of the distance of sunny woodlands, the long, shrill shriek of the engine sounded.

"Go on, sir," cried the groom. "There may be a delay at the station. It's a single line and the train may have to tarry till another reaches Queen's Hurst."

Julian did not slacken his pace. He knew that if he could only get close enough to the station to allow of his approach being noticed the train would wait for him.

The road was not straight, however, and his approach could not be seen until he was within two hundred yards of the station.

He gave the horse a touch with the whip. The animal stretched his head out and broke into a gallop sending the stones flying on all sides.

The tornado that Bertha had felt on her face became a wild cyclone. She was breathless.

Was it a race upon which a human life depended?

Was it a race of the Powers of Good against the Powers of Evil?

Were the mediæval God and the devil at it again?

If not, what did that shriek mean which sounded through the still air a quarter of a mile ahead of them?

It was the shriek of the train leaving Bracken station.

It was the shriek of the fiends that saw their victim ahead.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE SONG OF THE NIGHTINGALE.

JULIAN CHARLTON threw himself back and succeeded after a time in checking the career of the horse. He turned the animal, and walked him slowly back upon the road.

"'What Fates impose, that may but men abide,' " he remarked to Bertha. "We are the sport of circumstance. Never mind; it only means that we shall go back to town to-morrow instead of to-day."

"There is no later train?" said Bertha.

"The requirements of Brackenhurst are not many," said he. "No one is supposed to want to reach town later than 8.30. My only fear is for dinner."

"Oh, dinner," said she, somewhat carelessly. "A cup of tea is what I have set my heart on."

"With the accompaniment of a chop?" said Julian. "I have heard that no woman wants anything more bewilderingly elaborate for her dinner. That is why female clerkships have such small pay attached to them. If women took to beefsteaks and beer they would obtain the same pay as men. The authorities don't like wasting money upon tea and chops."

It was rather remarkable that within twenty seconds of the arrival of the shock caused by the missing of the train he was opening a discussion bearing upon the question of the remuneration of female clerks.

Perhaps this may have occurred to Bertha, for she mused *in silence for a few minutes* and then laughed.

"I will not shrink from the best dinner that the Court larders can supply," said she.

"I am uncertain about the dinner," said he; "but I know that the wines are to be trusted. There is not a bottle of red or white Burgundy that did not come out of the cellar of a bishop. You are always safe in buying a bishop's Burgundy. My poor father attended every prelate's auction in the country, and so succeeded in laying down a capital cellar. You shall taste a joy, Bertha, that has received the sanction of the Church."

She laughed.

Why was he prattling, she wondered, on subjects that were quite dislocated?

"You may, perhaps, find a dean with a thorough knowledge of vintage clarets; but you will also find that he is Evangelical," resumed Julian. "Ritualism is the alcohol of the High Church ecclesiastic. He can appreciate no other stimulant."

"How curious," said Bertha. "Are these facts or generalities?"

"We shall certainly have a bottle of the true Clos Vougeot," said he. "Ah, dearest, the bottled sunsets of the joyous land of France! I have not tasted it for years. It has always been the tradition at the Court that it must be drunk only to celebrate any notable family event. I drank a glass when I came of age. We shall have a bottle between us to-night."

"To celebrate your losing the train?" said she.

"Confound the train!" he cried. "Life is much more to us than catching trains."

He touched the horse with the whip, and sent him forward at a brisk trot; but when the Greystone copses were reached he pulled up, and dismounted.

"We shall stroll homeward through the park," said he.

"Nothing could be more delightful," she replied, *dismounting into his arms.*

"Drive on to the Court, and tell Mrs. Barwell what has happened," said Julian to the groom. "Tell her to do the best for us. We shall dine at half-past eight."

Carson touched his hat and rattled off when Bertha had quite done with the nose of the chestnut.

The groom had come to the conclusion that if Mrs. Charlton were not carefully looked after she would soon spoil every horse in the stables.

Bertha and Julian went through the gate; and then he led her away through a primrose path to the brink of the little trout stream. They seated themselves on the trunk of a fallen tree and listened to the marvelous music of the woods, mingling with the babbling of the stream. The water was laughing up in their faces, and they were laughing, too, with all their hearts, in the pure joy of living to see such an evening. The sun had sloped downward until the topmost foliage of the knoll up which they were climbing had become roseate.

He looked into her face and laughed.

"Your fair face is encircled with an aureole," said he. "My saint, my saint!"

He swung her hand that he held, and, still swinging it and laughing, reached the top of the knoll.

All the park and the country for miles around might be seen from this height. He pointed out every spot that had a name, and then turned to the Court.

A cloud of black smoke was going upward in the breathless air.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "That means dinner. You shall not be starved, my beloved; that I can promise you."

They went down the other side of the knoll, knee deep in primroses, bluebells, and mighty ferns. A colony of rabbits on a bank beside them stared at them for a few moments and then vanished.

The woods resounded with the laughter of the girl and

her lover. They laughed because it was the springtime, and the soul of the season had passed into their souls.

Every bird of the woodland was singing this evening. The sound was like that of a chorus trained to interpret one theme—and one theme alone.

A cuckoo was behind them and another could but faintly be heard in the distance, where a dark blue haze seemed to be spread about the trunks of the trees beneath the motionless leaves. Above the cloudlike foliage of the elms the swallows wheeled.

It was not until the terraces of the Court were reached that the rooks went cawing above them on their way to their nests.

Bertha ran upstairs, and Julian followed, after a conversation with the butler regarding the Clos Vougeot.

He met the housekeeper at the head of the staircase.

"This is a pretty state of things, Mrs. Barwell," said he. "I hope we shall have some sort of a dinner."

"A very poor one, sir; not what I would have liked," said she. "A few little things. Spring soup is the most we can do; trout, if you don't mind—it should be salmon—and a lamb cutlet with peas, and an omelet: a poor home-coming dinner, Master Julian."

"It will do admirably," said he. "And now, what room can I go to, to dip my face in water?"

"What room, sir?"

"Yes. I suppose Miss—us Charlton is in the pink room."

"She is there, sir; but you will find an extra basin in the dressing room"—and the housekeeper went to the door of the bedroom.

"No, no," said Julian quickly. "I—ah—do you mean to say that there is only the one room fit for a person to go to, Mrs. Barwell?"

"Why, of course, sir, there's only the one. I asked you about getting ready the other rooms, you may remember, sir, *and you said that nothing was to be done yet awhile. When you telegraphed yesterday I got the pink room made a bit*

more presentable than when you were here last. I hope it will do."

"Oh, of course, of course," said he. "I'll just go to the end of the corridor now and have a look at the boudoir for fear I should forget it. I cannot understand how the painted festoons on the ceiling should be fading over the fireplace. No, no, you needn't come with me, Mrs. Barwell." He went quickly along the corridor and entered the oval room which his mother had furnished for her boudoir. But when he found himself standing on the parquet he did not concentrate his attention upon the festoons which an Italian artist had painted on the ceiling; he stood silent—one hand still upon the handle of the door. Silent? No; he could hear his heart beating tumultuously. The thoughts that came to him overwhelmed him with their force; and yet all these thoughts had been suggested by the commonplace look upon the face of the old housekeeper, as she referred to the dormitory arrangements which she had been thoughtful enough to make, and by the mechanical way in which she had gone to open the door of the bedroom where Bertha was getting ready for dinner.

There had been neither smile nor smirk upon the woman's face. She had gone to open the door as she would have gone about the discharge of the most ordinary of her duties.

Great Heavens!

And here he was with his heart beating so that he could count every beat, and his hand trembling so that the handle of the door shook beneath his hold.

It was the awful assumption on the part of the housekeeper that the situation of the moment was one of the most ordinary in life that overwhelmed him.

If she had even smirked, it would not have seemed so appalling. But she gave not the smallest suggestion that the situation contained the elements of anything beyond what was *commonplace*.

He waited with the door slightly ajar, until he heard the

door of the room where Bertha was brushing her hair open, and the light tap of her shoes upon the oak staircase. Then he left the boudoir—faded festoons and all—and actually stole along the corridor to the pink room, opening the door as cautiously as though he were a burglar uncertain of the soundness of the inmates' sleep beyond the door.

The apartment seemed pervaded with her presence. He had read of the Blessed Damozel whose breast, leaning against a gold bar, had made the metal warm. He thought of it as he stood in the center of this room, feeling the gracious warmth of her presence in everything around him. He felt that if he had come suddenly into the room, not knowing that she had been here, he would have known in a moment that she had just departed.

And it was to this room that the housekeeper was about to give him access quite unconcernedly!

He went to the dressing table and lifted the brush that she had been using. Surely the ivory—that most unsusceptible of materials—was warm from her hand. It cast a delicate scent like that of a peach around the room. Her graceful summer wrap—a triumph of the art of that ingenious French artiste, Mme. John Smith of Regent Street—lay upon the mahogany Cupid which was carved upon one of the low posts of the bed. A little chubby arm projected beyond the quilted satin lining. It seemed to belong to the garment, this half-concealed Love. He put his hand under the cloak and touched the body of the Cupid. Beyond doubt the mahogany was warm. The warmth that had come to her mantle from her shoulders had warmed this little chubby Cupid into life. His Blessed Damozel had made her influence felt upon everything in the apartment.

The gong sounded in the hall below.

He hastened to dress, and to descend to the drawing room.

She was standing at one of the open French windows, the *exquisite glow* of the soft summer twilight around her.

"I asked the butler not to light the candles," said she. "This lovely light is too sweet to be shut out."

She pointed to the west.

Above the dark trees of the park the sky was blue as a transparent turquoise. In the narrow spaces between tree trunks and the lower drooping boughs the mellow crimson faded into shell-pink, and about the topmost leaves a few light clouds floated: they were permeated with gold. High in the west the evening star was hanging like a lamp.

"And we shall hear the nightingale to-night," said the girl in a rapt voice, that was scarcely a whisper.

"We shall hear the nightingale to-night," he repeated.

"We shall hear the nightingale singing beneath that star—the star of love—our star, dearest—our star."

"Our star," she repeated.

They actually believed that they had a joint proprietary in the evening star.

The Lord made the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night, and the evening star for Julian Charlton and Bertha Lancaster.

"The nightingale sings to the roses," said he. "The evening is full of the perfume of roses, dearest. What shall be for us to-night? The song of the nightingale, the perfume of roses, and the glow of the star of love over all."

She kept her eyes fixed upon the west.

Through the silence that followed he could hear the beating of a heart.

He knew that it was not his own.

When the gong sounded again he brought her into the dining room, and filled up her glass with the glorious red wine, that sparkled beneath the light of the candles in their silver sconces.

It was an hour and a half before they returned to the drawing room. The Venetian glass chandeliers were listening with *their many candles*. Bertha seated herself at the piano-

forte. It was a fine instrument, and it had been kept in tune during Julian's wanderings by the organist of the church, who had been accustomed to play upon it.

Only one song did she sing, and that only in a hushed voice. It was so good a setting of Swinburne's lines that no publisher would undertake the risk of publishing it. There was a passion in the music, the publishers said, and passion was not for the drawing room.

" In the lower lands of day—
 On the hither side of night—
 There is nothing that will stay,
 There are all things soft to sight,
 Lighted shade and shadowy light.
 In the wayside and the way
 Flowers the rain has left to play,
 Hours the sun has spared to smite.

" Shall these hours run down and say
 No good word of me and thee?
 Time that made us and will slay,
 Laughs at Love in me and thee.
 But if here the flowers will see
 One whole hour of amorous breath.
 Time shall die and Love shall be
 Lord, as Time was, over Death!"

She sang in a passionate whisper—that whisper of passion that pervades the words—the most subtle ever written by the hand of man. A poet had written them, a poet had set them to music, and a woman was singing them to her lover.

Her voice was the vocal expression of an Italian twilight. But when the low tones of the melody changed into a song that became a song of triumph with the words, "Love shall be Lord! Love shall be Lord! Love shall be Lord," the room was filled with the pæan.

Before the last notes had passed away she was in his arms.

That was what the poet meant—that was the legitimate *end of the song*.

They went together out into the night.

The air was luscious with the scent of the roses. The light from that great lamp of love in the heaven was glistening upon the large diamond drops of dew in the hearts of the roses.

The air made the lovers joyous.

"Oh, faithless nightingale!" she cried. "The world is silent—the world is breathless, waiting for your song. Sweet bulbul, every rose in the gardens of Gul is waiting in tears for her lover! Sweet nightingale! I have waited all my life to hear your song that I may know if its interpretation is love, and yet you will not pity us."

Her light laughter rang down the glades, but there was no response to her prayer.

"And I thought that the nightingale was the most faithful of nature's singers," she continued.

"It will sing yet," said he. "Why should it come last night, and not to-night—this night of nights?"

They wandered down the terraces, and drank more of the intoxicating perfume of the rose beds.

Suddenly from the shrubbery there burst forth a strain of passionate melody that thrilled the silence of the night—that flooded the night with music as the heaven is flooded with moonlight when the moon is at its full.

"Bertha, can you interpret it?" he whispered. "My beloved, do you know what is the realization of the song of the nightingale? My beloved, does your heart not tell you?"

She was clinging to him. His face was looking down on hers. The light of the great star shone upon the tears within her eyes. He saw her lips part as if to speak, but only a little sob came from her throat.

"My beloved, our hearts to the nightingale's song are attuned," he whispered. "What is the song that is in your heart, darling? What is the song that is in your heart?"

"Love, love, love," she sobbed. "You will always love me, dearest, as you do now?"

"Always, always, my love—it is my life—it is my life when my love parts from me my life is at an end."

"I know it," she said. "I know what they mean—song of the nightingale, the scent of the roses, the glow of that star. My heart has drunk from the same fountain that has given them life."

Their faces were together, but only for an instant.

He found himself standing alone, looking into the blue of the night.

How did he come to be alone? He returned to the dining room.

She was not there.

And the nightingale's passionate song went on through that glorious night, and the star of love still reigned supreme in the high heaven, and the roses filled the air with their luscious scent.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE TYPE OF THE FAITHFUL.

MR. AND MRS. CHARLTON were away in the depths of the woodland glades when they should have been sitting at their breakfast.

This was the more remarkable, the butler told Mrs. Barwell, as they had plainly not retired until a very late hour, for he had found all the candles in the chandeliers in the drawing room burnt down to the very sockets. It seemed to him that they had only retired when the candles had actually been burnt out.

He earnestly hoped that Mrs. Charlton was not one of those ladies who are given to late hours not only in town, where it is quite natural, but in the country also, where it has a bad effect upon the maidservants.

Mrs. Barwell had a plausible theory to account for madam's liking for late hours. It was founded upon her acquaintance with the fact that when it is night in England it is day in Australia—she had heard this from a trustworthy authority, she assured the incredulous butler—and therefore it stood to reason that, as Mrs. Charlton had been accustomed all her life to spend the night time in the broad daylight, it was only natural that it would take her some little time to adapt herself to a country where, owing to the blessing of Providence, nights were nights.

When, however, Mrs. Charlton returned with a bright and rosy face, which she buried among her primroses—just as though she were a young maiden hiding her blushes, as the housekeeper afterward remarked—she did not suggest the

appearance of one who had remained in the candlelight until a late hour.

She hastened to place her primroses in a great Worcester bowl on the breakfast table.

The head gardener, who had watched her walking with her armful of primroses among the beds, which, through his extraordinary diligence and careful application of bell glasses, were blooming a month before their time with what he called the genuine article, as opposed to the primroses which were no roses at all in his estimation, did not think very much of the young madam's judgment in flowers. She gave not a second thought to the real rose beds, he believed.

Had he but known!

The morning ramble of Mr. and Mrs. Charlton represented all their rambling for the day.

Mr. Charlton explained to the housekeeper that Mrs. Charlton had been so pleased with the Court and with the kindness of everyone in the house, and especially with the charming little dinner which had been prepared for her under such exceptionally difficult circumstances, she had resolved to remain for some time in the country instead of returning to town for the remaining festivities.

Mrs. Barwell was delighted, she said. The cook was glad to be off board wages again, and the maids were to be depended on; but what about the footmen?

Mr. Charlton said he would see about the footmen the first time he took a run up to town. Meantime, as he was sending a groom to the telegraph office at Brackenhurst, Mrs. Barwell had better telegraph her orders for fish and ice, and those other trifles which make life at a country house endurable.

The telegram which Mr. Charlton dispatched by the groom was one to the maid Miriam, desiring her to forward the three Saratoga trunks with their contents, which belonged to Miss Lancaster, by train to Brackenhurst, addressed to *Mrs. Charlton, The Court.*

Having done so much after breakfast, Mr. Charlton took a book out of the library. Mrs. Charlton took another. They seated themselves on a very easy garden chair and began to read.

The nook where they sat was in the shade at this time; but the sun moved round the house, and the oblique shadows cast by the walls became shorter and shorter until at last the seat which had been sheltered was full in the glare of the sun. But the two readers who sat there paid no attention whatever to the change brought about by the diurnal motion of the earth. The gong sounded for lunch, but they did not stir. The butler knew something of the fascinations of literature—he subscribed to *Tit-Bits*—but he became surprised when neither his master nor mistress appeared at the window of the dining room. He put on a straw hat and went in search of them.

He found them sitting, one at either end of the garden seat, sleeping soundly among their countless cushions.

(He subsequently assured the housekeeper that Mr. and Mrs. Charlton had got up quite too early in the morning, and the housekeeper said, "Oh!")

When the butler had kicked about the gravel and coughed with severity, and then apologized, hastening back to the porch, Julian rubbed his eyes and looked at Bertha.

"I suppose it was the warmth and the silence and the general feeling of completeness that sent our souls into the intermediate world," said he.

He put out his hand to her. She put her left hand into his. He caressed it for a moment, and then suddenly dropped it with an exclamation that startled her.

"What is the matter, dearest?" she cried. "Have you read my line of life? Is it so very terrible?"

"Great Heavens!" he cried. "Look at your hand—the hand of a wife."

She looked at her fingers. They were very pretty—white

and taper. But they were encircled by no ring! She gave a little start and flushed.

"Pray Heaven that it was not noticed," he whispered. "If Mrs. Barwell has eyes at all she will have seen it. We shall soon know: she will give a month's notice to-morrow, if not this evening."

"She would not live in the house with a wife who does not carry about with her the outward and visible sign of the Church's bond of slavery?"

"It would be a reflection upon her character—she lays the accent on the second syllable—to suggest that she would do so," said he. "Come up with me and I will provide you with the—what do you call it—the token of slavery?"

He was afraid that she would decline. It might not be in accordance with her principles to wear a ring. She was so severely strict when it came to any question of conventionality in regard to marriage.

Only for a moment after he had spoken did she look at her fingers; then she gave a little laugh, as if she had come to the conclusion in her own mind that it was no treachery to her principles to humor him in so trifling a matter.

They went upstairs together, and out of a safe concealed behind a panel in the wall he brought a jewel case. It contained a number of loose trinkets in gold and silver, nearly all of Oriental manufacture. A dozen rings lay before her, several without gems.

"My mother's jewels are kept at my bankers for fear of accidents," said he. "These are trifles collected in the course of my travels. Are they all too large for you?"

"This is the only one that fits," she replied, holding up her left hand with a broad circle of yellow gold on the third finger—she seemed to know the right finger on which to put the emblem.

"It is a Persian ring," said he. "It is engraved with a motto from the Koran on the inner part. It refers to the

symbol of the circle. I got it translated for the benefit of such ignoramuses as myself who cannot at a moment's notice read off a text from the Koran. It means: 'Without beginning—without end—earthly completeness—a type of the faithful.' I bought it from one of the faithful at Teheran. I also detected that one of the faithful using false balances in weighing it. Here, I place it upon your finger; are you sure that is the right one?"

"Do you fancy there is a civilized girl who doesn't know which is her wedding finger, as they call it?" cried Bertha, offering him a dainty digit, delicately white, with a pink, almond shaped tip.

"I suppose there is no such girl," said he musingly, with his eyes fixed upon the Arabic characters on the inner rim of the ring. "I suppose not; only I thought that you——"

"Why should I be different from other girls?" she said. "I am daily coming to learn that I am in no way different from any of the race. I may have thought at one time that we had little in common; but now—with the exception of that one prejudice—I am in no way different from other girls."

"And that one prejudice," said he, "is what other girls hold dearer than their religion—dearer than love itself—almost as dear as—let us say diamonds."

"That is where—thank God—I differ from them," cried the girl. "You heard what I sang last night. 'Love shall be Lord—Love shall be Lord—Love shall be Lord!' With other girls the words should be, 'Marriage is Lord'—perhaps 'Diamonds are Lord.' Ah, if women were but faithful to their own hearts what a world of joy it would be! Perhaps you and I shall live to see that great good brought about. We shall yet live to see the false gods dethroned—that Baal of society lying in the dust. Women have been too long worshiping the form of marriage, and taking no thought for the *reality*, which is love. Let them take to worship-

ing love and all will be well. If it be love in very deed it will remain part of their lives forever, just as it is all our life now, my beloved—it will not require the bond woven by the priest to keep it fast to their lives. That love which needs to be bound with fetters to the life which a man and a woman lead together as husband and wife is not love at all, but something quite different from love."

"My dearest," said he, "there was a time when I did not agree with you, but now your thoughts are my thoughts. Yes, 'Love shall be Lord—Love shall be Lord—Love shall be Lord!' Your finger—quick! I place upon it this mystic symbol of that which is without beginning—without end—a symbol of love's completeness—a type of the faithful. My love, you are faithful, not merely unto death, but unto something which is stronger than death—faithful unto love."

He slipped the yellow circle on her finger and put his ar as about her.

They were considerably late for lunch.

It was a great descent from the heights of the psychology of love to the plains of plain cookery.

The butler was severe in his demeanor toward them. He served them with an air of Christian resignation, which is the most exasperating attitude on earth.

The cook did not possess the exasperating virtue of Christian resignation. She was loud.

The housekeeper raised her hands and declared that she was greatly surprised at the want of consideration displayed by Mr. and Mrs. Charlton. If they had been on their honeymoon there might, she admitted, be some excuse for them; but having been married some months, as she had good reasons for assuming they were, she felt bound to say—though she frankly allowed that it went to her heart to do so—that they were a couple of young fools.

It was only when Mrs. Charlton confided in the housekeeper that she was becoming extremely anxious about her

Saratoga trunks, which had not yet come to hand, that Mrs. Barwell regained her composure, and was led to form a higher estimate of the young lady's capacity.

The young lady who was sincerely anxious about the arrival of Saratoga trunks could not be altogether in a pitable condition.

That night the nightingale sang again.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON VARIETY IN LACE.

THE anxiety which Mrs. Charlton had displayed regarding her trunks was not to end the next day. A groom met the trains at Brackenhurst station, but though they contained much that was valuable and interesting consigned to the Court from London tradesmen, yet the goods' van contained no trunk addressed to Mrs. Charlton.

In the afternoon a second telegram was sent to Miriam; and Bertha resolved that if the trunks did not arrive on the next day she would go to London for them in person. It was all very well at an Australian station, where civilization was only holding its own by the aid of a stock whip, to live apart from the luxuries of tea gowns, of white velvet smothered in old Mechlin lace, and of dinner dresses of pink silk embroidered with pearls—these were not absolute necessities in the bush; but it was a very different thing when one came to associate with Romneys, and Sir Joshuas, and Sir Peters. One could not appear in the presence of so many scrutinizing eyes of people who knew so well what it was to be well dressed, unless one looked one's best. She felt herself constantly apologizing for her one dress to these coldly critical ladies—she did not mind their husbands in the least; she was not so sure that a man knew all about the art of dressing. She had heard the remarks of men occasionally on the subject of a woman's dress, and they displayed an amount of ignorance that was most discouraging to a girl. Bertha was clever enough to know that women do not dress for the eyes of men, but for the eyes of *women*.

While she was making up her mind to go to town by the afternoon train, Charlton's man of business called at the Court, and carried him away to his office at Brackenhurst to decide some of those intricate points in regard to leases, which cause the intellect of a country gentleman to be perpetually brilliant. The human intellect is bound to coruscate around the clauses in a lease as the lightning plays around the platinum tips of a lightning conductor.

Julian was absent for two hours, and when he drove back and pulled up at the porch he had scarcely time to give the reins to the groom before he was aware that Bertha had run out from the drawing room to the hall to meet him, and that she was wearing her white velvet tea gown smothered in lace, as the white moon is occasionally smothered in fleecy clouds.

He joined in her laugh of triumph.

"At last, at last!" he cried.

"At last, at last you are returned," she responded.

"I meant the trunks," said he—"the things."

"The things are here all right. And I have a surprise for you. They did not come alone."

"All surprises are disappointments unless one is prepared for them. What is it?"

"It is not *it*, it is *he*."

"He? Who is he?"

He had taken off his gloves and hat, and was about to open the door of the drawing room when he heard a loud, honest laugh in the direction of the dining room door. He turned. He had heard that honest laugh before. It came from Eric Vicars, who was standing at the open door of the dining room, his large frank features glowing through the shadow, as a Japanese lantern glows by day.

It took Charlton some time to remember that he was in his own house.

"Here I am, as large as life," cried Eric, flinging out his

hand to Julian as though he were shaking some drops of water from his fingers.

"How do you do?" said Julian. "Have you come from town? I hope you have had something to eat?"

He had discharged all the duties of an English host in regard to a visitor. He felt that he had nothing to reproach himself with.

"I've had a regular feed, my boy," cried Eric, "Bertha tells me that I should have come in time for tiffin; so I should, but that I missed the train—went into the refreshment room with a decent fellow I met in the 'bus, and the train didn't wait for us. We did all the waiting—for the next. No harm done, though I've played old Harry with your cold lamb and those pretty round things without much eating in them—what did you call them, Bertha?"

"Croquettes," said Bertha. "Never mind. It was so good-natured of Eric; wasn't it, Julian? He was afraid that the trunks might go astray, so he took charge of them himself. It appears that Miriam left Chelsea with all her belongings two days ago, but Eric wisely opened the telegrams addressed to her, and—well, you have never seen this tea gown. The velvet is smothered——"

"Yes," said Julian. He was wishing with all his heart that the fate which had befallen the velvet might overtake his guest. "We should be greatly obliged to Mr. Vicars for his trouble."

"Don't say a word about that, my boy," cried Mr. Vicars. "If I wouldn't take some trouble for Bertha, who would? Just tell me that. Why, her and me are the oldest of chums. Many a time I have set her on horseback, when her little legs could hardly touch the stirrups, though the buckle was in the farthest hole of the leather. And when I saw what name was in the telegram, 'Eric,' says I, 'if you're not the first to congratulate that young bride, you'll deserve to be kicked.' Well, my lass, didn't I do the thing properly?"

He clapped Bertha in a good-natured familiar way on the shoulder, and Bertha actually laughed.

Julian Charlton did not laugh. When a man's blood has been rapidly increasing in temperature until at last it reaches boiling point he does not, as a rule, laugh.

"Poor old Eric!" said Bertha. "His heart is certainly in the right place. Was it not good-natured of him, Julian?"

"It was—very good-natured of him," replied Julian quietly. "Very" was not, however, the word with which, in his mind, he qualified the good nature of this man. "We cannot stand here for the rest of the afternoon," he continued, opening the drawing room door. "You had better walk inside, Mr. Vicars."

"It's a big room," said Mr. Vicars. "I don't suppose the smell of a tobacco pipe would be much felt where the ceiling is so high. I'm accustomed to a pipe after meals, and I've had a pretty square meal just now, though the what's-their-names are more dainty than satisfying to a born bushman like I am."

"Don't think of such a thing, you big boy," said Bertha. "A tobacco pipe in a *Louis Seize* drawing room!"

"Perhaps you might be interested in the stables, Mr. Vicars," remarked Julian in frigid tones that suggested the most cordial inhospitality. "There are only a few horses now, to be sure, but——"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Bertha," said the ex-overseer: "you just run and throw on a hat or something, and the two of us will stroll around this run. I want to have a yarn with you about old times. That's my programme."

Julian Charlton turned away and tapped the barometer that hung beside him. Curiously enough, the index showed no sign of running down to "stormy."

"How could you expect me to go roaming with a bushman such as you are, in such a costume as this?"

"I saw the day, my fine lady," shouted Eric in that fine,

hearty, honest voice of his—"I saw the day when you didn't take much thought for your furbelows and flounces—when you were offering your big Eric a kiss for a ride on his saddle behind him."

"For God's sake," said Charlton, "let us either go into the drawing room or into the billiard room. We cannot remain here all day."

Bertha was startled by the tone of his voice; she had not heard him speak in that tone since—she could not immediately recollect when he had heard it, but in a few moments she remembered. He had spoken in that tone when he had gone to her to say that he had accepted her principles. The steamer had been brought into dock, and Eric had just met her.

"Let us all go into the billiard room," said she, leading the way across the hall.

"Anywhere that I can smoke my pipe, and have a chat with you, my fine lady, will do for your humble servant," said Eric.

"And now," said Bertha, getting beside Julian, "I want you duly to admire my gown. It is my own idea, not Mme. John Smith's."

"Oh, come, I say, if you two haven't got over your spooning just say so, and I'll make myself scarce," cried Eric.

He spoke in his usual boyish style; but Julian Charlton, who had lived some time among men in various parts of the world, failed to perceive any corresponding expression of frankness in the man's eyes—at least not just at that moment. Charlton perceived in the man's eyes the visible sign of what was in his, Charlton's, own heart at that moment. He read his own secret in this man's eyes. Jealousy was in their glance—jealousy was burning in his own heart. The man had not got a sufficiently thick mask of civilization to conceal what he felt. Charlton had.

Amazed though he was with his discovery he made no sign.

"I think your gown beyond comparison the most charming I have ever seen," he replied to Bertha. "The lace is Mechlin, is it not? I always admired it infinitely more than Spanish or even Venetian."

"If I am in the way, just say so," remarked Eric.

"One looks for freedom from conventional types in Venetian lace," said Julian, "but one rarely gets it. Now in Mechlin—I refer of course only to the best examples—one finds unlimited imagination; it is nearly always unrestrained, and yet it is invariably graceful and appropriate."

"I am so pleased that you like this," said Bertha. "I felt quite sure of it myself; but my education is, alas, only beginning."

"We have chests full of various types in some of the rooms upstairs," said Julian. "Pray remember that they are all yours."

Mr. Eric Vicars felt that he was being quietly shunted, even by the young woman whom he had taught to sit on a pony and to crack a stock whip. What a hand that fellow who was now talking like a girl on lace and gowns and rubbish of that sort, would make at governing a buck-jumper! What a fool of himself and of everybody within range of him he would make if he were to try to crack a stock whip! Riding buck-jumpers and cracking stock whips—these were the points that showed what a man was made of. But when these were supplemented by a knowledge of branding which was practically inexhaustible, and by an acquaintance with the most approved methods of shearing sheep, and by an unerring judgment as to the treatment of rams at certain seasons, they put a man on a level with the ancient gods.

Long ago Bertha Lancaster had shown an appreciation of such splendid intellectual endowments—ram selecting is clearly an endowment, though stock whip cracking may be in some measure an acquirement; but since her father had been *foolish enough to engage* for her at Sydney quite an

army of governesses and professors—first-rate people for playing good hearty, practical jokes upon—she had steadily degenerated, until she had now reached that low level upon which lace and such like fal-lals were found useful as topics of conversation.

As for the man who could talk of lace seriously, he was, Mr. Vicars thought, beneath contempt. He should be treated as one treats a child or a clergyman. One does not take children or clergymen seriously; and it would be ridiculous to do more than smile at Mr. Charlton in that pitying way which is inseparable from patronage.

But though Eric Vicars made up his mind to smile in his most aggravatingly good-natured way upon Mr. Charlton's remarks upon haberdashery, yet he did not do so. There was a cold, irresponsive look in Mr. Charlton's eyes that made smiling extremely difficult. Eric even found that warmth of language and that heartiness of manner which were his leading characteristics wanting as he filled his pipe opposite Mr. Charlton in the billiard room.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON WHITE VELVET.

"IT'S a rum sort of world this," remarked the ex-overseer after a considerable pause. "Who would have thought a few years ago when we were romping together—as free and easy pals in the bush—that you would ever bloom out into such a fine lady with an old English mansion like this at your back? Why, when I caught a sight of this house from a turn in the avenue I began to whistle 'The Jolly Roast Beef of Old England'—I did, upon my soul. But do you think I was took aback at the sight of the place? Not me. 'I may be a bit rough,' says I——"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Charlton. "Not a bit—a *bit* is not the word. You do yourself an injustice."

"I feel that I'm a bit rough—it's true, Mr. Charlton," continued Eric, shaking his head in that deprecating way assumed by people who make it do duty for a number of unexposed virtues. "But if I'm a bit rough"—here he perceived that his host was smiling very gently—he wondered if it was on record that a guest had ever kicked his host over a full sized billiard-table—"if I'm a bit rough, my heart's in the right place, sir; let me tell you that."

He was very vehement—so much so that in slapping his knee he swallowed a mouthful of smoke and began to cough with a breadth and feeling that could only be sustained by a person whose heart was perfectly sound, both as regards constitution and situation.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you, Eric?" cried Bertha, when his face had become less purple. "What made

you take so much pains to convince us that your heart is in the right place? No one could ever doubt it."

"No one, indeed," said Julian quite pleasantly.

"If any man doubts it," said Eric, "he had best look out for himself. I may be rough——"

"No, no—not *may* be," whispered Julian as if conversing with himself.

"But I stand no damned nonsense," continued the overseer, bringing his fist down upon his knee with a force that showed that his soundness was not confined to his heart.

Julian turned his eyes upon Bertha with something of an inquiry in them. He seemed to be asking her if, as an old acquaintance of this man's, she had ever witnessed such singular manifestations on his part, and if they were usually long of duration.

Bertha flushed, and Julian's face became white.

"Eric," said Bertha, "I am ashamed of you. You have no reason to make use of such strong language. Pray remember that you are not in the stockyard now."

"I wish I was," said he thoughtfully. "Why did we ever leave it, you and me, Bertha?"

"Look here, my man," said Julian Charlton; "don't you think we've had about enough stockyard reminiscences and stockyard language to last us until train time?"

"Until train time? You mean to turn me out of the house?" cried Eric, starting to his feet. "Is this your boasted British hospitality?"

"Come, Eric, don't make a big fool of yourself," said Bertha in a soothing voice, taking his hand. At the action Julian's face became whiter.

"I'm not making a fool of myself," shouted Eric. "It's you that brought me down here to make a fool of me, and I'll not stand it—no, I'm——"

"It was very good of you to bring me the trunks," said *she*. It was clear that she estimated this service a good

deal higher than Julian did. "Indeed it was very good of you."

"That goes for nothing nowadays, it appears, in your so-called British Islands," sneered Eric.

"So-called fiddlesticks!" said Bertha. "Sit down and behave properly, you foolish fellow!"

"No," cried Eric indignantly. "I see that you are changed from what you used to be. I'm not welcome to Bertha the fine lady, as I used to be to Bertha the squatter's lass. I may be over-touchy in such matters—I can't help it—it's my nature—I'm not one of your fine artificial gentlemen that hide their feelings—I say what I mean, and what I say comes from my heart—there's no mistake about my heart. Good-by, Bertha; it goes to my heart to say the words—but they must be said. I'll never darken your door again."

He drew his sleeve across his eyes—it is a way these fine, warm-hearted, over-sensitive fellows have. Their eyes are their weak point.

"There is a train in an hour and a half," remarked Julian in the coolest way possible. "The dogcart will be at the door immediately. I suppose you have a good deal of business to get through in the city. Most colonial merchants find their time fully occupied."

"I don't want any dogcart," cried Eric. "Keep your dog-cart for—for—puppies."

He roared with laughter. He had clearly scored a point by his readiness in retort.

"After all, I dare say you are right to walk," said Charlton quietly. "A few miles on a fair road cannot be thought anything by a—a—colonial—gentleman who does not suffer from any cardiac complaint."

"Good-by," said Bertha. "Poor old Eric! It was so good of you to bring me my trunks."

"I saw the day—but never mind," said Eric. "Good-

by—good-by to you, sir"—he turned to Julian—"I bear you no malice. It shall never be said that Eric Vicars bore malice against the man of your choice, Bertha. Maybe the day will come when you will hurry to the side of your poor old Eric. I don't want to be a prophet of misfortune, but you may come to me yet. Those are the farewell words of Eric Vicars."

"Good-by," said Julian, about to lead the way to the hall door with the politeness of the most hospitable host. But his visitor did not permit him to carry out his intention. The door chanced to be open, and Eric, after catching up his hat and stick, which lay on an oak table beside the porch, stalked out of the hall, leaving his host quite ten feet behind.

Julian went on to the door and closed it. He knew that his visitor would not have gone so far down the avenue as to be unable to hear the sound of the door closing.

"Poor Eric seems to have become very sensitive," said Bertha, when Julian returned and met her in the center of the hall. "But it really was kind of him to take charge of my trunks down here."

"I must say," said Julian, "that for one who affects to know nothing of lace, you have been extremely happy in your choice—those bits on the sleeves are of the rarest design."

"This is the gown that I was longing for," said Bertha. "It is all my own. Mme. John Smith of Regent Street wanted me to have the white velvet of the sleeves slashed with some colored material. She said it would be Florentine. I held out against any color whatever. Was I right?"

"There cannot be a doubt on the matter," said he. "The white velvet is your white soul."

"*Smothered in lace,*" laughed the girl.

"White soul smothered in lace—that sounds like a cookery recipe," said he.

The hall rang with laughter; but when Julian Charlton had gone to the library, saying that he wanted to hunt up a lease, there was no sound of laughter either in that apartment or in the drawing room, where Bertha had gone to wait for him.

The girl stood at a window watching one of the under gardeners working the lawn mower. Pain was at her heart. She knew that Eric had behaved badly; he had been even more than usually rough—that is to say, he had spoken from a deeper depth of his heart than usual. But he had conveyed to her the precious trunks, and surely a man who brings to a woman three Saratoga trunks packed with such articles of attire and adornment as she has been longing for during a space of three days, might be excused for taking certain liberties of speech. Eric Vicars was her oldest friend. He had taken care to remind her of this fact more than once in the presence of Charlton; and it seemed to her that, at each reference to her previous acquaintance with the man, Julian had become whiter in the face, until at last he had almost insulted his guest.

She was pained that Julian should have been so annoyed by any friend of hers, and she was pained that any friend of hers should be almost insulted by Julian, especially as this friend had conveyed to her some trunks of importance. She felt that Julian might have passed over with only a smile whatever coarse expressions had been made use of by Eric. But from the first he had shown a marked antipathy to poor Eric. Why he had done so she could not say. It actually seemed to her that Julian was showing himself to be jealous of Eric. No, she could not accept the suggestion made by her instinct in this matter. Jealous—her husband—she called him her husband, of course—jealous of Eric. The idea was too ridiculous to be entertained.

She tried to destroy by reasonable arguments the results of her instinct.

She was scarcely successful.

Women seldom are, when they make the same attempt.

In the library, whither Julian Charlton had gone to look out a legal document, he was standing at a window watching the operations of the lawn-mower and listening to its clatter. His hands were clenched and his eyes were gleaming.

"If he comes across this threshold again I shall kill him like a dog," whispered Mr. Charlton, shaking a fist in the face of an ancestor of his who occupied a prominent place in a broad gilt frame.

Then he began pacing the room, after the manner of one of the animals which it is thought prudent to keep within a strong cage in any zoölogical collection. After a time he gave an exclamation of contempt, and flung himself into a chair.

"Fool!" he said in the same whisper to the same unmoved ancestor. "Fool! Jealous—jealous of that clown. No, no; not jealous—not jealous—and yet—why did that far-away look come to her eyes when he introduced those damned reminiscences which she shares with him? Can I forget the way they met when the steamer got into dock? I saw it in his face. If I had not promised her then to give way to her, what would have happened? God knows." He leapt to his feet. "My God! how I love her—love her—love her!" he cried with clasped hands.

He had approached a corresponding point to that reached by another man who, when racked with mad jealousy, cried out:

"Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!"

Some minutes had passed before he repeated his exclamation of contempt.

"Jealous? Not I—not I," he said, with a laugh. "Jeal-

ous of him—him—a common boor! Pah, as reasonable as to be jealous of—of that lad outside," and he looked at the under gardener working the lawn-mower.

He was endeavoring to reason himself out of his jealousy.

He was scarcely successful.

Men seldom are, when they make the same attempt.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON A BISHOP.

THE next day Bertha was made aware of what an English May could do in the way of rain. So far from feeling inclined to grumble, however, her Australian memories caused her to rejoice at the steady downpour that blotted out from view even the nearest trees of the park. The squatter's daughter looked on rain as the best of nature's gifts—only one that was not bestowed with sufficient frequency.

She had not yet spent a summer in England.

She clothed herself in waterproofs and made an excursion on foot with Julian to the home farm, winning the admiration of the farmer's wife by her intelligent observations on the subject of lambs. Where this handsome young lady had picked up her knowledge of the treatment of stock the good woman could not imagine. She had no hesitation in assuring her husband, however, that Mrs. Charlton was one of the right sort, even though she did not belong to any of the leading families of Brackenshire. It was an open question in the good woman's mind if the percentage of Brackenshire ladies who would face a downpour of rain for the sake of accompanying their husbands to a farm was large.

Bertha's trudge home through the muddy lanes she felt to be altogether delightful. The English farm was a new experience to her, and she confessed that it was infinitely more picturesque than any Australian station she had ever known. The farmhouse looked, she said, as if it had *taken root* in the soil, and the furniture had not the

appearance of being made out of flour barrels and tea chests.

There was not much of the tea chest look about the old oak dresser she had just seen with the date 1618 carved upon it. The most picturesque bush stations were those which gave one the impression that the owners meant them to do duty for only a night or two, and the furniture was suggestive of ingenuity rather than stability. The English elms were far finer than the blue gums, she declared, and though she admitted that the absence of the mosquitoes gave her a feeling of loneliness, yet she felt certain that, in the course of time, such isolation could be endured by her with resignation, if not with absolute cheerfulness.

"I should like nothing better than to have a number of such farms," said she, "and to visit them every day."

"You need have no difficulty in gratifying your inclinations in that direction," said he. "You can get plenty of them cheap enough just now."

"I should so much like to give assisted passages to England to some of the struggling Australian farmers whom I have seen," said Bertha. "They cannot make a living out there owing to the competition, the dearness of labor, and the uncertain climate. And yet, according to what you say, we have a fine country here only waiting to be occupied by industrious men. Yes, a few sturdy emigrants from Australia to England appear to be what this place wants."

Julian laughed.

"Upon my word," said he, "I am not so sure that you are wrong. I am not so sure that the importation of fresh blood from the old colonies to England would not bring about a good state of things for us here. Well, you have *some money of your own*, I think you told me?"

"Yes, I have more than ten thousand a year. But is it not yours now, Julian?"

His face became grave.

"How could it be mine?" he asked. "If you were to die to-morrow I could not claim a penny of your money. God knows I would not try to do so. I have no wish to be regarded as an unprincipled scoundrel. That is what people would call me."

"But I thought that in England when a girl with money married——" She stopped suddenly. He did not make any attempt to suggest what he knew was in her mind. "I forgot," she said in a low voice. "I forgot that one important point in the eyes of your English law. But I do not suppose that the law is powerful enough to prevent my doing what I like with my own money."

"No; your money is your own, so long as you live."

"No, it is yours, my beloved. I shall take care that it is all transferred to you. You are my husband, and a husband should have the sole control of all the money that is available."

"Not a penny will I have anything to say to," cried Julian. "God forbid that I should ever touch a penny of it. I am not so bad as that."

Her eyes opened very wide as they were turned upon his face. This girl, for all her shrewdness—it approached very close to wisdom—in some matters, was as innocent as a child in others. He perceived this and his heart smote him. It gave him a sharp buffet, but the pain did not last long.

"If I had not given way to her she could not have avoided the snares of a man with such a fund of reminiscences as Eric Vicars," was the thought that came to his help—a thought that conveyed that balm for the healing of his heart's buffet.

"I am indeed surprised that you should say such words to me, Julian," said she.

"My dearest," he cried—and there was real pain in his voice—"our last words on this subject have been spoken. I can never refer to it again."

"Very well," said she; "I will not urge anything on you. All I can do is to consult you and obtain your sanction for all the money I may spend. I told you that I did not know how to spend money, and did you not promise to teach me? It would seem, however, that I am further off the time of instruction than ever. During the past two years I have been compelled at least to pay for my own house and for what I ate and drank, but I have not now even the satisfaction of making such inroads upon my income."

"Buy a few more velvet gowns strangled—no, smothered is the word, I believe—in old lace," said Julian, brightening up once more. "Do that and carry out your scheme of colonizing England, and you will find that your money will soon cease to be a burden too grievous to be borne."

"I will do that," she said. "And I will also spend some money in endeavoring to bring people to believe as I do on the subject of marriage."

The brightness died out of the face of Julian Charlton.

"You do not mean to start a newspaper?" he said with some degree of anxiety in his voice.

"A newspaper? Oh, dear, nothing of the sort."

"Nor a society of the carnisolist type?"

"Not even a society, Julian."

"Don't tell me that you mean to get up lectures throughout the country."

"Certainly not—lectures are to amuse, not to instruct. It is to a theater one goes if one wants to be instructed."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"I mean to fill our house with visitors—people of influence, you know—and let them see how happily you and I get on together without shackles. That is my plan. That

is how I mean to bring people to see with our eyes. My dearest husband, the force of our example will be felt upon everyone with whom we come in contact."

"I see," said he, without any expression of great enthusiasm.

"You agree with me?" she said in a tone of inquiry.

"Undoubtedly, my dearest, I see that—that—if you get the right people to come——"

"But we must get the right people, Julian. Where can the difficulty be? We must get people without prejudices."

"You will have to go out of England for them."

"I don't think so. The clergy will be hard to convince—of course I am prepared for that."

"You had better be prepared for it."

"But we shall get some well-known clergyman—a bishop, if necessary, certainly an archdeacon—to come and stay with us for a while, and we will convince him that it is possible for people to live a proper—nay, a noble life, if they only love one another truly, as we do, Julian. We will show all the world that love is the foundation of all good on earth—not marriage."

"You will convince the bishop or the archdeacon of the truth of this?"

"Why should we not? They are educated men; some of them are even intellectual, I believe. Why, wasn't it a bishop who said that he would prefer to see the people of England free drinkers than enslaved teetotalers?"

"It was a bishop who said something in that way. But, my dear Bertha, it is not yet on record that a bishop ever said that he would prefer seeing a man and a woman who loved each other truly living together without being married, rather than seeing in that condition a man and a woman who, without loving one another, have gone through the ceremony of marriage."

"I don't suppose any bishop has ever said so much yet ;

but I hope I shall live to hear one express a preference that would do honor to himself and the Church. We must do our best to bring about that record, Julian, and we shall do it, if we are only in earnest."

"Yes, we must be in earnest, that is certain." The tone in which Charlton spoke was such as would lead one to the conclusion that his period of earnestness had not yet arrived. He may have had a suspicion that his tone conveyed this to Bertha, for he added after a pause, "Anyhow, my beloved, we will keep ourselves in a position to convince all comers that two people can continue loving each other truly and nobly, even though they have departed from the beaten track which civilized people have trod for many centuries."

"Julian," she cried, "that track that you talk of is like the slave track from the interior of Africa to the coast; it is covered with the skeletons of those who have fallen beneath the weight of their shackles."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE WAR PATH.

THERE is sometimes a cessation of the downpour on a day in May in England. Bertha found this out before she and Julian had reached the Court. Before sitting down to lunch a gleam of sunshine came from a break in the clouds, and as the girl stood at the window for a few minutes she saw the lovely stretch of lawn flash into ten thousand glorious emeralds. The trees of the park were laden with diamonds, and the birds were clamorous with delight at the recovery of the sun.

Julian had ordered horses for four o'clock, Bertha having assured him that the walk of the forenoon had not in the least fatigued her. So soon as he saw her in the saddle he knew that there was no girl in Brackenshire who had such a seat on horseback. So far as his recollection served him, there was no girl in the country who looked nearly so well as she did in a riding habit.

He felt exuberant as he put his horse to a trot on the soft road leading to the remains of a famous castle, mentioned by Sir Walter Scott in one of his novels. Every stranger to the county was without delay conveyed to this place; and Julian thought that the sooner Bertha got it over the better prepared she would be to face all inquiries that might be put to her on the subject of the castle. Having lived in the colonies she had cherished her Scott as well as her Dickens and even her Bulwer-Lytton. She was able to keep Julian from making any very glaring mistakes in his attempts to rehabilitate the castle in its ancient splendor for her benefit. He soon found that it was he who was

being instructed by Bertha regarding the archæology of the neighborhood.

The ride of six miles along the road was very delightful, even though it had a "sight" for its object. The scent of the rain-drenched leaves filled the air, and the colors of the well-cultured fields on either side of the road were exquisitely fresh. They did not waste much time upon the castle. It was enough that Bertha pointed out to her companion the very window through which Scott's beautiful, but history's homely, heroine had watched the departure of her lover for the fight where he got so much glory. Under the influence of Bertha's instructions Julian began to get quite interested in the well-preserved ruin close to which he had lived nearly all his life. He had no idea that there was so much in it.

Any man who wishes to become thoroughly acquainted with the topography and the history of England, together with the beauties of Scott, Dickens, and Bulwer-Lytton, should marry a young woman from some of our colonies. A young woman who has lived in any of the New England States will do equally well, only she will insist on his knowing something of Emerson also, and this is a drawback.

Returning to the Court by the lanes, they overtook another couple on horseback. The animals were standing across the lane, and the man was pointing out with considerable effusion to the young woman who was by his side, something that seemed remarkable in a very commonplace sort of meadow. He was taking such pains to point out the imaginary object that Julian at once knew that the man had been drawing the young woman's head close to his own, or indulging in some similar freak of human nature, when the sound of the approaching hoofs had surprised him into propriety.

This being so, he was careful to turn his eyes away from the strangers when he was riding past them. He did not

wish to make the man feel any more embarrassed than he actually was at that moment. The horses of the strangers, however, were not so absorbed in the view at the other side of the hedge as they were at the prospect of taking a mouthful out of the necks of the approaching animals. The consequence was that both the horses, which were meant to remain passive, wheeled suddenly round just as the two others were passing them, and the action revealed to the astonished eyes of Bertha and Julian that the man who was pointing over the hedge with his whip was Cyril Southcote, and that the young woman whose interest he was pretending to be endeavoring to arouse was Marian Travers.

"Heavens!" cried Cyril, "is it really you?"

It was rather a feeble remark for a polisher of paradoxes to make; and this shows how dangerous it is for such persons to ride about dim lanes in the month of May, with a girl possessing a charming figure for a riding habit by their side.

"I am delighted," cried Marian, her face roseate either from the effects of her delight or from the effects of the view over the hedge. "It cannot be," she continued, looking earnestly at Bertha—"and yet——"

"Yet it is," said Julian. "Why should it not be? Why should we not be on a road within three miles of our home?"

"Of *our* home—*our* home?" cried Marian, looking from him to Bertha and back again to him, and then at Cyril, who, she could see, was preparing something clever and paradoxical as an after greeting to his friends. "Our home? Ah, then, the congratulations which I ventured to offer in the docks were not misplaced, though you tried to make it appear that they were, you silly things!" she added. "And when is the event of events to take place?"

"*The event of events?*" said Julian.

"Perhaps you do not look on a wedding as anything special," remarked Marian. "Well, in the simple language of Mary Jane, when are you going to appear at the Hymeneal altar?"

"Never," said Bertha promptly.

A puzzled look was on Miss Travers' face as she stared first at the speaker, then at Julian Charlton. The result of her observation of Bertha was indefinite, but the result of her searching gaze into Charlton's face was to convince her that he was annoyed at something. Cyril Southcote, being a man, considered himself competent to arrive at a just conclusion respecting the exact import of the girl's exclamation.

"Your riddle is on a level of ingeniousness with one of Bunyan's," said Cyril. "'They that are down need fear no fall'—that is the interpretation of your 'never,' Mrs. Charlton."

"What," cried Marian—"married already?"

"Yes," said Julian, after a pause of a few seconds and in a tone of indecision.

The tone of indecision puzzled Marian Travers. Why should Charlton be undecided, she wondered. She believed that if there is any subject upon which a man—unless he has lived all his life in Scotland—should have thoroughly made up his mind, it is as to whether or not he is married.

"Married already? How odd!" she remarked, looking again from one to the other.

"Odd?" cried Cyril.

"Odd?" cried Julian. "Well, I cannot for my part see where the oddity of the transaction lies. Dear Miss Travers, young men and young women get married every day, and if they don't live happy, we may."

"'Never morning wore to evening but some heart did break'—there you have the Laureate's account of it," remarked Cyril.

"That is scarcely the same thing," said Julian.

"Well, there are exceptions, no doubt," said Cyril.
"But as a general rule——"

"I detest cheap cynicism," said Marian. "My dear Miss Lan—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Charlton, I offer you my congratulations, and trust that you will not refuse them this time."

"I will not refuse them, indeed," said Bertha.

"How curious it was that immediately after you came down from Ladder Hill at St. Helena I prophesied whom you had met, Mr. Charlton!"

"No better system of prophecy has yet been hit upon," said Cyril. "After the event is the safest time for prophecy."

"But in this case I had no idea that Mr. Charlton had met anyone," said Marian. "None of us had the least idea that Miss Lancaster was aboard the steamer. Did I not prophesy accurately, Mr. Charlton?"

"I own that I was astonished, Miss Travers. I will not say how much your prophecy contributed to the happiness which I enjoy."

"Do not make use of the singular pronoun," said Cyril. "Matrimony may properly be described as a condition of life in which there is no first person singular. You should not say 'I,' but 'we.'"

"I fancied that I saw the germ of some flower of speech in your glance," said Julian. "I like the blossom."

"It is very sweet," said Bertha.

"And now," cried Marian, very prettily, "have you no prophecy to indulge in, so far as we—I think you said the pronoun should always be plural, Cyril—so far as we are concerned?"

"What! you and Cyril——?" exclaimed Julian.

"Why not?" inquired Marian.

"Why not, indeed?" laughed Julian. "And he was

pointing out something in the meadow ! By Jove, you are a man after all, Southcote, and not a mere maker of paradoxes."

"Your flattery is overwhelming," said Cyril. "Why, cannot you see that there is something exquisitely paradoxical in the fact of one who perceives paradoxes in all things being engaged to be married?"

"Of course I see that—we must all see it," laughed Charlton. "But if you take to living paradoxes, my friend, I fear that your wife will have an uncomfortable time of it."

"We mean to be comfortable. I will break him of that distressing habit—it is only a habit, whatever people may say—of being clever."

"Pray accept my—*our* congratulations," said Bertha.

"Which we offer with all our hearts," said Julian.

(It was only a little over a month since he had been so alarmed aboard the steamer at the prospect of Mrs. Hardy offering him her congratulations.)

The intention of the horses to stand the delay no longer was beginning to be more definite than was consistent with the comfort of their riders.

"We must get on our way," said Julian. "I fear that we have far too long diverted your attention from that object of interest which you were observing so earnestly on the other side of the hedge. We are delighted to meet you, especially under such circumstances."

Miss Travers then explained that she and Cyril were guests at Queen's Elms, Sir Edwin Rushton's place, a few miles beyond Brackenhurst. She would, she said, be very pleased to drive to the Court with Lady Rushton in the course of a day or two. Bertha endeavored to say how glad she would be to see Miss Travers and Lady Rushton ; and so, with waving of hands, the two couples parted, greatly to the *satisfaction of the horses*.

"Great Heavens!" cried Julian when he and Bertha were a mile on their way. "Great Heavens! that young woman possesses something akin to genius. I knew she would not go back to the Afrikanders. I saw that look in her eyes when she said good-by to the commissioner. I am inclined to believe that she did not contribute to the happiness of the commissioner's existence at the Cape. And Cyril Southcote—a fellow who has knocked about as much as any fellow alive—a fellow who has had warnings enough of girls in all the colonies—who knows of what they are capable when hard pressed—great Heavens! Well, never mind! I only hope that Sir Montague will make him a generous allowance. Perhaps Cyril will be induced to do something on his own account now."

"I like Marian Travers," said Bertha. "O—Julian, if we could only induce them to follow our example, now that we know they love each other! If we could but——"

"For God's sake, Bertha," he cried, "do not let such a thought take hold of you. You could have no idea what harm you may do."

"But when they love each other——"

"How do you know that? The notion of Marian Travers being in love, as you and I regard being in love, Bertha, is too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment; she has had her experiences—— Never mind! Although there is a material difference between the phrases 'she has loved much' and 'she has loved many,' still much should be forgiven her."

"What, you do not believe that she is in love with him!" Bertha brought her horse to a standstill as she spoke. It seemed a very serious matter to her, this marriage without the certainty of love.

"Who knows?" said Julian. "She may be really and truly in love at last. I am not disposed to judge her. It *is not everyone* who can show such a clean record as you

and I, dearest. What did you say this morning? The slave track from the interior to the coast—ah, my beloved, if you had had my experience of observing that convergence of cliques which goes by the name of society, you would say that it is the track of the *débutante* to the altar that is strewn with the skeletons of her dead loves. I wonder sometimes when I see a lovely young matron sitting in her carriage among her children if, now and again, she does not hear the shriek of some of those past loves of hers, who in battle were slain and unburied remain inglorious on the plain. Pah! This is the sentiment of the third-class novelist, who invariably treats his readers to a chapter on the skeleton in the cupboard. 'The skeleton on the war path' is the heading to my chapter."

"But those ghosts—those ghosts!" said Bertha.

"There are no ghosts, my dear," laughed Julian. "You have read the vision of the prophet—the most marvelous thing in literature, I believe it to be. It refers to the matter about which we have been talking. When the young woman gets married to the man of her parents' choice—perhaps of her own choice—for sometimes the two chance to coincide—there is a great moving among dry bones. They rise up and get married too, and their wives sit pleasantly among their children in the carriage. So civilization triumphs over savagery. The Society for Psychical Research has proved that there never yet was a ghost whose origin could not be traced to the kitchen. Your cook, not your chaplain, is the person to whom you must apply if you want your unquiet spirits exorcised."

"And you, Julian, have perceived all these years how society has made a mockery of God's gift of love, and yet you are not enthusiastic in your desire to help me bring about a better state of things?"

"Oh, cursed sprite!" said Julian, putting his horse to a *canter*. "Come, dearest, if we do not have a canter before

dinner there is no knowing what we may find ourselves talking about—human affinities and animal magnetism, maybe."

Though Bertha was anxious to pursue the conversation to a logical conclusion, she thought it better to send her horse forward until it was abreast of his on the soft turf, and, side by side, they cantered up almost to the very porch of the Court.

She put on one of her most subtle dinner dresses—a brocaded silk of the most delicate pink that was ever seen in nature—a pink that may only be found in the inmost lining of an East Indian shell, or on the bosom of a maiden who has been in the arms of her lover.

Bertha's bosom was dazzlingly white in comparison with the tulle of her dress, when she sat down to dinner; but before the candles were lighted in the drawing room after dinner, her bosom had become as delicately roseate as the second example which nature affords of the subtle tint of the brocaded silk.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY.

JULIAN CHARLTON had been very well acquainted with the Rushtons of Queen's Elms previous to his setting out on his travels. Sir Edwin Rushton was the fourth baronet. The first had been of great service to the government of Mr. Fox, and had received his baronetcy as a reward. He had been moderately wealthy; but cards, horses, and plain daughters had been so fatal to the prosperity of the family that the fourth baronet, who had four daughters exceeding in plainness even the most characteristically plain of their grand-aunts unto the third generation back, was known to be yearly in search of a person willing to lend money upon the security of unlet farms. As he had not discovered this philanthropist, his circumstances were, as a rule, straitened.

Julian recollected how each of the four plain daughters of the house of Rushton had shown herself sympathetic with his own aspirations. He had been a scientific explorer in those days, and in order to show her sympathy, the eldest had openly scoffed at the book of Genesis—thereby ruining her prospects with the young rector who had just been presented with the living of Brackenhurst.

When his artistic fit came upon him, a year later, the second bought ten yards of old gold muslin at Mr. Liberty's, a pink paper shade for the lamp, and a screen with a stork on it. She had tied the muslin in scarf lengths round the flower pots, she had made reading impossible with her lamp shade, and she had provoked a critical comparison

among the very frank members of her household between herself and the bird which appeared on the screen.

He had talked to the third on the subject of English literature, and she had forthwith subscribed to the *Family Herald*. The remaining daughter heard that he was musical. She took lessons on the banjo.

The four daughters remained unmarried.

But it is scarcely necessary to say that, however straitened and uncertain the income of a country gentleman may be, he still keeps his riding horses and his coach horses, his butler, footmen, grooms, under grooms, coachmen, cooks, laundresses, housemaids, scullery maids, kitchenmaids, dairymaids, lady's maids, and all the other consumers of cold beef and pickles—cheese and beer—who find indoor relief beneath the roof of the family mansion. The Rushton family had all of these; and though they could not afford to maintain a house in town during the season, they invariably entertained a number of visitors in the summer and autumn.

In the winter they gave dinner parties—county family dinner parties—monuments of dullness.

It appeared that Miss Travers and Cyril Southcote were among the visitors at Queen's Elms—the first of the summer set. Sir Edwin and the commissioner had been in the same regiment in their youth, and Lady Rushton had known Marian's mother.

As for Cyril Southcote, he was understood to be so clever as to be thoroughly good for nothing; and thus Sir Edwin thought he had sufficient grounds for entertaining the hope that he would propose to one of the plain daughters. He had not done so; but he had proposed to Miss Travers, whom he found to be everything that a nice girl should be—including an appreciative listener. Appreciative listeners were getting rarer every day, he felt. Girls were *getting* to be able to talk for themselves, and to hold

theories of their own ; so, though he had been content during the greater part of the voyage to merely observe Miss Travers, yet, during the last week she had been so appreciative a listener, he felt a wrench at parting from her. Two days after they had come together at Queen's Elms he had spoken to her on the subject of love.

He found her to be an appreciative listener.

Julian Charlton was not a vainer man than most men ; but he knew perfectly well that Marian Travers had been disappointed when she found that he was looking forward, not to marrying her, but to marrying the strange girl whom he had found at the summit of Ladder Hill at St. Helena. He fancied that he had noticed a curious little bitter smile about her lips when they were waving hands to one another in that shady green lane. He wondered if Miss Travers had any touch of malice in her nature. He was looking forward to her visit with some degree of eagerness—some degree of anxiety.

Bertha was also looking forward to her visit. She was wondering if it might be possible to obtain the practical sympathy of Marian for her scheme for the elevation of love.

She had actually a hope that she would, in a moment, obtain the sympathy of a young woman who had all her life studied the best means of obtaining a husband !

She actually hoped to have the co-operation of the young woman whose lover (that might have been) she had annexed !

Three days passed before Lady Rushton, accompanied by Marian Travers, one of the plain daughters, and Cyril Southcote, paid her a visit to the Court. Sunday intervened, and both Julian and Bertha went to church. The experience of an English village church was a new and a very delightful one to the girl. The building had not been subjected to that system of spoliation known as "restor-

ing"; consequently it remained picturesque, with old oak pews like loose-boxes, and free from the abomination of pitch pine and varnish. The family angels of the Charltons wept in marble, with a monumental tablet between them, over the square pew where Bertha and Julian sat. The originator of the mural monument had evidently been of a thrifty mind. He had determined that so large a square of marble, should not be wasted with the inscription of only the name of his wife and child, in whose memory he had had it carved. He had caused the two names to be put up in a corner, and the word "also" to be cut below them. When a death occurred in the family the name of the deceased was neatly cut under the previous name, the word "also" being added as before. The tablet seemed to have threatened at one period not to last out, so the stone mason had considerably cut the later names only half the size of the first four rows; and it could not but have led up to some cheerful reflections on Julian Charlton's part, to observe that there was plenty of room for three or four additional names on the tablet. His name was not likely to be huddled into a corner. But Bertha, reading the list during one of the Lessons, was somewhat disturbed when she found that it ended with "also." Julian's head was just beneath this word. The effect was grim.

The sermon was one that must have been highly appreciated by the villagers to whom it was addressed. It was a sound, practical, homely discourse as to the exact significance of certain Greek particles in the writings of St. Paul. It doubtless helped to free the farmers' minds from all misgivings on a subject, which it is generally understood—if one may judge from the sermons that one hears in village churches—has agitated the agricultural classes for many years.

Returning to the Court, Bertha admitted that the Misses

Rushton were very plain. They had occupied one side of the pew next to the Charlton's, and they had been injudicious enough to sit side by side. Plain daughters ought not to concentrate their forces. Artfully distributed each of them might even have seemed passable.

The one who accompanied her mother to visit the Court realized the idea of Diana done in terra cotta, in all points except features and figure.

Lady Rushton was small, but stately and excessively patronizing. She patronized Bertha.

"Marian has told me all about you, my dear," said she. "You are a colonist—a New Zealander, I believe."

"I was born in Australia, Lady Rushton," said Bertha.

"Ah, I knew I was right," said Lady Rushton. "Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Fiji—they are all the same."

"Quite," said Cyril, "quite the same—to some people."

"Exactly; he has been there, so he should know," said Lady Rushton assuringly to Bertha, lest she should insist on her absurd distinctions being recognized.

"He has been where?" said Bertha.

"There," said Lady Rushton. "New Zealand."

"He is more fortunate than I am," said Bertha; "I never was there."

Lady Rushton smiled a pitying, patronizing smile.

"In England," said she, "we are not accustomed to draw such delicate distinctions. We call people who have been born in Devonshire English, just as much as people who have been born in Northumberland. Some who have been born in Cornwall and on the borders of Wales are called English by courtesy."

"They are indeed," said Cyril, nodding approvingly.

"You see," said Lady Rushton, waving her hand toward Cyril. "And so you need not be otherwise than quite at your *ease with us*, Mrs. Charlton. We know that you can-

not help having been born in New Zealand. They are a most interesting people, I am given to understand; are they not, Mr. Southcote?"

"Extremely," said he. "They speak English fluently."

"You see," said Lady Rushton, with another wave and another patronizing smile. "So you need not be afraid, Mrs. Charlton. You will never hear your birth alluded to. No one whom you are likely to meet in society could possibly have the bad taste to refer to such a matter."

"If anyone should it would be a great pleasure to me," said Bertha. "I am very proud of having been born in Australia."

"Oh, dear!" said Lady Rushton, lifting up her hands.


"In Australia, I need hardly tell you, who seem to be so well informed, Lady Rushton, there are quite as noble families as any in England. The best groom I ever had in Australia was the second son of an English peer, and the best hand my father had on one of his sheep runs was the representative of a family that came over with the Conqueror."

"My dear Mrs. Charlton!" cried Lady Rushton in a tone that suggested extreme incredulity.

"The police sergeant at one of our stations was the son of a bishop," continued Bertha, "and for several months our head sheep-shearer was the brother of a baronet."

"A baronet!" almost shrieked Lady Rushton, as if she felt that this young woman whom she meant to patronize was becoming unwarrantably personal. "A baronet! there must be some mistake."

"There is none, I assure you," replied Bertha. "But you English must not fancy that because your best families work for us in a menial capacity we decline to regard you as on a social level with ourselves—or, at any rate, very nearly so. No, I assure you, Lady Rushton, there is no *foolish exclusiveness* among us in this respect."



There was a silence in the drawing room. Cyril Southcote even was breathless. He looked admiringly at Bertha, and then glanced at Julian. He could see that Julian did not admire this "scoring" on Bertha's part. Cyril knew that men do not as a rule admire a display of cleverness by their own wives.

In the midst of the silence tea was brought in, and Bertha was excessively gracious in offering her visitors tea. The plain daughter wondered how she would look if she possessed lace like that which Mrs. Charlton was wearing. She rather thought that it would suit her "style." Plain daughters are fond of referring to their "style."

Marian Travers thought that perhaps her turn had come to converse with Bertha. Julian fancied that he detected about the corners of her mouth the little suggestion of malice which he had noticed there more than once before.

"I told Lady Rushton of the romance associated with your meeting," said Marian, glancing from Julian to Bertha. "Was it not romantic, Lady Rushton?"

"Extremely romantic," said Lady Rushton. "But I have known romantic marriages turn out all right in the end," she added. "Yes—some."

"And I can only hope that ours will come to be regarded by you as a valuable addition to your experience in this way, Lady Rushton," said Julian.

"I hope so," said her ladyship seriously, but with a deprecating shake of her head, which was equivalent to an expression of doubt that rather outweighed the hope.

Cyril perceived that this was distinctly rude on the part of Lady Rushton. He also perceived that Bertha had not failed to accept it as a piece of rudeness.

"Oh, I think we may take it for granted that you will be happy, Mrs. Charlton," said Marian.

"And I will take it upon me to answer for your husband, Mrs. Charlton," said Cyril.

"Thank you ; you may," said Julian. "How odd it was, Lady Rushton," he continued ; "Southcote and I were talking one afternoon on the phenomenon of love." Lady Rushton straightened herself in her seat. She did not like the sound of the phrase. She was not sure that it might not have some improper import, which would be quite unfit for a daughter to hear. "Yes, and what was most singular in the matter was that Southcote declared that there was no such thing as love unless one fell into it, and I held that it was largely due to sympathetic association. And yet, before three days had passed, I had found out that I was quite astray in my theory, and before two months had passed he had proved that he accepted my principles."

"How delicious !" cried the plain daughter. "I am nuts on romance," she added, with a smile of extraordinary breadth and color. She felt that in saying "nuts" she had reached the farthest limits of human fastness.

"I don't see any reason for your exclamation, Euphemia," said Lady Rushton. "I think that mutual esteem and respect, both of which constitute the true foundation for hoping that a marriage will result in happiness, can only be acquired through time. There is a proverb about marrying in haste."

Cyril perceived that Lady Rushton was clumsily attempting to put into practice a policy of reprisal. She was determined to make Bertha suffer for having not only declined to be patronized, but for having herself assumed the rôle of patron.

"I hope that our repentance may not come at leisure," said Bertha gently.

"I was glad to see you at church," said Lady Rushton—the word "repentance" suggested the topic.

"It was the first time I was in a church in England," *said Bertha.*

"Except, of course, when you were getting married," said Marian, with a laugh.

There was a silence.

"I said, except when you were getting married," repeated Marian in a louder tone.

"I cannot say that the picturesqueness of the sermon was quite so striking as that of the old church," said Julian. "I think that business about the Greek particle a trifle beyond the average of erudition that one looks for in a village church."

"I considered it most improving," said Lady Rushton. "I do not consider that the Church of England is a fitting subject for jest."

"Nor is any other Church, in my opinion," said Julian.

"There is no other Church," said Lady Rushton. "I leave Dissenters to look after themselves."

"Which most of them do," remarked Cyril. "They look after the non-Dissenters as well, during their spare moments, and with such considerable success as is excessively annoying to the non-Dissenters."

"The colonies are swarming with Dissenters, I hear," said Lady Rushton, looking meaningly toward Bertha.

"Are they really?" said she.

"I think," said Marian, "that if I were getting married I should choose such a charming little church as we have at Brackenhurst. Why did you not come down here to be married, Mrs. Charlton?"

"You see, Bertha's aunt lives in town," said Charlton quickly—almost breathlessly.

"To be sure, I remember Mrs. Hardy very well—so motherly!" said Marian. "And so you were compelled to suit yourselves to circumstances. I was in town until a week ago. Why did you not ask me to the wedding? I would have let nothing interfere with my going."

"*Why, you never gave us your address,*" said Julian.

"Never mind, Miss Travers, we bear you no malice; and I promise you that we shall be present when you are being married."

"You certainly must," said Marian, "What church in London did you say you were married in?"

"My dear, Lady Rushton will take another cup of tea," cried Julian, rising to relieve Lady Rushton of the custody of her cup.

"No, thank you," said Lady Rushton. "What church did you get married in?"

She believed in her heart that Charlton had married a Dissenter. She was determined that the offense should be admitted. She had not failed to observe the evasion of the question put by Miss Travers.

"We got married in no church, Lady Rushton," said Bertha quietly.

"Great Heavens!" whispered Lady Rushton, "no church! I knew it. A Dissenting chapel—I have heard of them—all whitewash and snuffles."

"Neither in church nor chapel nor in the presence of a registrar," continued Bertha.

There was a long silence.

Lady Rushton was paralyzed with astonishment.

Even Cyril Southcote was somewhat surprised.

Then Lady Rushton took a long breath. She looked at Bertha, then at Julian, then at Marian.

Then her eyes rested upon her plain daughter.

The sight aroused all the British mother within her.

With something like a cry she sprang to her feet and rushed to her daughter.

She stood between the Child and the Contaminator—between a monument of terra cotta and one of marble.

"Spare us!" she cried imploringly. "Spare my child! She at least is innocent; she knows nothing of this iniquity."

"Lady Rushton," said Marian, "I am sure that we are under some mistake."

"We are," said the mother; "the mistake was coming here at all. You brought me, Marian Travers—you brought me, and—ah—the Child—take her away—let her escape!"

"There is no mistake whatever, Miss Travers," said Bertha. "Mr. Charlton and I are just as honorably husband and wife as if we had gone through a ceremony in a church. We love one another with a love that is God's best gift. We are married in the sight of God."

"In the sight of the devil, woman!" cried Lady Rushton. "I see it all—I see it all!"

Charlton went to the bell rope, and thence to the drawing room door. He opened it to the fullest extent.

"Lady Rushton's carriage," he said to the footman.

Lady Rushton lifted up her head, drew down the corners of her mouth, squared her shoulders, and keeping well on the weather side, so to speak, of her daughter, to protect her from the possibility of contamination, stalked out of the room.

The daughter looked around, and, smiling pleasantly at Bertha, made a little movement with one of her thumbs in the direction of her mother—the action was not one that suggested respect.

"This is a curious business," said Cyril, standing at the door. "Of course I know there is something behind that we know nothing about; but still——"

"I am bewildered, I frankly confess," said Marian, arching her eyebrows. "I suppose Mr. and—well, let us say, Mrs. Charlton, understand their own business and what is due to society."

"You are quite safe in supposing so much," said Charlton.

"But you cannot blame us if——"

"In no way do we blame anyone for anything," cried Julian. "Lady Rushton is getting impatient."

"Good-by," said Marian. "I wish I had not so insisted on——"

"Do not distress yourself," said Julian. "You had much

better give all your attention to making peace with Lady Rushton."

After a moment's pause, broken only by the sound of Lady Rushton's voice from her carriage; Marian put out her hand to Bertha. Cyril gave a sigh of relief. He hated a scene.

"After all," said he when Marian was at the point of leaving, "marriage is like sin : it resolves itself into a question of geography."

"Cyril," cried Marian, "may I beg that you will recollect that I am present."

"I recollect it perfectly," said he. "My dear Charlton, yours is a most interesting experiment. I wonder how it will end. Anything new in marriage or poison has always interested me greatly. I have never had the courage to test any novelty for myself in either direction, but this fact does not prevent my being greatly interested in watching the effect of a novel poison or the realization of a new idea in that relationship which the Church calls marriage. What do you call your system—the name Free-Love has a *souçon* of vulgarity about it? A taking name is vital to the success of such a cult. I did not fancy such an idea as this could possibly be put into practice in this century and by people in society. I admire your courage exceedingly. It deserves to succeed, but it won't. Good-by. I hear your wedding bells in the distance."

Whatever he may have heard in the distance he certainly heard the voice of Marian Travers close at hand. She had gone from the room making a gesture of impatience, and had again called to him from the hall. There was some shrillness in her voice.

In another moment the hoofs of the very indifferent coach horses of the Rushton family were tearing up the gravel of the avenue.

Bertha and Julian stood alone in the drawing room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON BEING THOUGHT A SCOUNDREL.

"THAT is the first of the scenes we may look for," said Julian.

"If that woman is a specimen of the aristocracy of England," said Bertha, "all I can say is that I prefer such examples as we have around us in Australia. The Honorable Jeff was a man of good feeling as well as a first-rate groom, and Courtenay Riders, the baronet's brother, was chivalrous in every way. Why, that is nothing but a vulgar old woman—without education, without good sense, full of prejudice, ignorance, pig-headedness, and insolence."

"Lady Rushton is by no means a bad specimen of her class," said Julian. "She would not have so much minded that we are not married——"

"But we are married, Julian."

"Of course, dearest, as we regard marriage; but what set her back up was your giving her so clearly to understand that you would not submit to be patronized by her. She could not stand that. Did you notice how she tried to force you to confess that you were a Dissenter?"

"And if I had been one——"

"She would probably have said that you showed very bad taste. These country families who have got no ideas beyond phosphates and drain pipes, just as their fathers had no ideas beyond turnips and mangolds, thank God that they have still their Church of England. To be a Dissenter shows very bad taste, they think."

"I wonder that Miss Travers, who really is a nice girl, can tolerate *that narrow-minded old woman.*"

"My dear, Marian Travers knows what suits herself. I feel at this moment that she had reasons of her own for forcing you into a corner: I fancied that I saw more than a suspicion of malice in her expression when we were parting from her a few evenings ago."

"Why should she bear us any malice?"

"Who can tell what she may account as a sufficient reason? Never mind. We are independent of all such people. You and I, dearest, can live for one another."

"You are not sorry, Julian, that you have accepted my principles?" said Bertha after a pause.

"My dearest," said he, taking her hand and looking very tenderly into her face, "I made up my mind I could not live without you. You may rest perfectly assured that I shall never even think of reproaching you for anything. We stand together, Bertha, in this business. I agree with all that you have said regarding the union of love and the shackles of marriage, even though we should be cut off from society."

"And you think that we shall be isolated—boycotted by all your friends here?"

"I am sure of it. But what does it matter to us, Bertha? Think of the amount of money we have between us. That renders us independent of the narrow-minded county circle. We can live anywhere we choose."

"The people in London are surely above all narrow-minded prejudices."

"They are. You might depend on making a success in London. They are constantly on the lookout for a novelty in London. The inventor of a new religion is the hero of the hour. Atheism was the cult a few years ago. It is now an indication of old fogysm to mention the word. Avowed atheism will never put anyone into parliament again. Agnosticism has had its turn. Then came spiritualism, then theosophy. Meanwhile the day of what idiots

called æstheticism came—and went. After several false alarms I believe that society in London is given over to the worship of the Honest Doubter. He is usually a clergyman with strong convictions. He cannot remain in the Established Church because his convictions are too strong, and he will not join any other Church because no other Church contains members that have precisely the same convictions as his. The Honest Doubter is a clergyman who has weak brains, but strong convictions. He is the hero of the moment. But you could easily cut him out if you went to London. The county families will ask no one to visit them who is in any way original ; but in town the original man or woman is the honored guest. In fact, the original man or woman is the cause of the assembling of guests. The hostess of to-day must have a lion on view before the other animals can be induced to visit her. Oh, they have no narrow-minded prejudices in London, on the subject of the private life of their lions ; and if now and again the beast turns and rends his hunters, no one minds much. There is no hunting lions without a little risk. That's a speech for you."

"I would consider that sort of fame in town worse than being boycotted in the country," said Bertha. "Never mind, my beloved ; we will not boycott each other, you and I."

"So, then, all's well," laughed Julian.

He had almost come to believe that all was well.

He had counted the cost—roughly. He had not, of course, had a chance of going into the details of the matter carefully, but he had fully reckoned on being subjected to that isolation, which at one time was alluded to as Coventry, but which is now termed boycotting, so far as the county where he lived was concerned. He had traveled, and he had a mind of his own, consequently he knew that to be *deprived of an occasional visit from people who had*

put their minds into a sack of guano without any fertilizing results accruing from the contact, should not plunge him into despair.

At the same time he could not but feel that the scene through which he had passed was an extremely unpleasant one. It is always mortifying for a man of some intelligence to know that a person quite devoid of intelligence has parted from him with a feeling of having got the best of an encounter.

He knew that Lady Rushton would feel that she had, by stalking out of the drawing room at the Court, completely overwhelmed him and Bertha, and that she would lose no time in spreading through the country the story of her victory. Therefore, though he had given Bertha to understand that all was well, he had some misgivings on the matter in his own mind.

He had told Bertha that she might prepare for being isolated by the county. He believed that this at least was inevitable. Everyone in the county detested Lady Rushton, but no one had the courage to hold out against her. People visited only where she visited. He was therefore greatly surprised when he received a card, expressing the pleasure that it would give Lord and Lady Ashenthorpe to see Mr. and Mrs. Charlton at a garden party at Ashmead on the following Friday afternoon.

After some thought he accepted the invitation. He determined that he would give the county to understand that it was not his intention to alter his mode of life because Lady Rushton had seen fit to stalk out of his wife's drawing-room with her head in the air.

He did not expect to have any more visitors during the week, but in this matter also he was mistaken. Lunch had just been laid on the Wednesday afternoon when Mr. and Mrs. Hardy appeared in the one fly that was available at *the railway station*.

Bertha and Julian had just returned after a morning's trout fishing in the Purlbrook. They lost no time in welcoming their visitors, and Julian took good care that his expressions should not be less cordial than those of Bertha.

The secretary of the carnisolists had on, as usual, a black suit of that smooth cloth which every villager in the old days touched his hat to. He looked more like a clergyman than ever. He was just a trifle too solemn for the part. But the clergyman's trick of declining to turn his head without turning his whole body he had caught to perfection.

With his hat off he looked like a man to be respected—say, a butler.

Mrs. Hardy was smiling in her own way. She would not remove her bonnet when sitting down to lunch. Her husband not only removed his hat but made preparations for removing his cuffs as well, only his host prevented him from taking this extreme step. Even though it might be an important part of the ceremonial of the carnisolists, Julian, thinking of the prejudices of his butler and the new footmen, politely insisted on his retaining his cuffs.

Mr. Hardy ultimately allowed himself to be persuaded against his own instincts of thrift in the laundry department ; but in spite of his compliance Julian Charlton began to suspect that he was not altogether a person who was in the habit of mingling with the best society. Julian's experience of moderately good society had led him to believe that the removal of linen cuffs preparatory to lunch was not *de rigueur*.

Mr. Hardy seemed to have none of the prejudices of the carnisolists so far as diet was concerned. He partook liberally and indiscriminately of every dish that was offered to him—of the animal, vegetable, and lobster-salad kingdoms—of the product of the vineyard and olive-yard alike.

His freedom in this way placed Julian at his ease, though he feared that it might not have the same effect upon Mr. Hardy himself.

As for Mrs. Hardy, she was almost as indiscriminate in her diet, though she took good care to acquaint her niece with the elementary properties of every dish. She knew the flesh-formers from the fat-formers, and partook of both.

Julian received his visitors with some misgivings at first ; for he thought it was very likely that he would be required to enter into some explanation to Bertha's relation regarding her presence at his house—a matter which required to be very delicately touched upon, and one which was not susceptible of explanation except to persons who had succeeded in freeing their minds from a prejudice that was almost universal.

Now, as he questioned very much if Mr. and Mrs. Hardy were accustomed to approach the consideration of the marriage question with wholly unbiased minds, he felt that he might have more or less difficulty in satisfying them that the domestic system which had been adopted at the Court was founded on the truest principles. When, however, he found them both greatly interested in their lunch, and referring, when they had time, to the varied charms of a country life and the excellent quality of the timber of the park, he came to the conclusion that their visit was a congratulatory one, and not one of inquiry. They were clearly satisfied, he felt, at the step which their niece had taken.

He found out, however, when he had given Mr. Hardy a large cigar, and had led him to the billiard room after lunch, that Bertha's aunt's husband was not disposed to pass over the matter of Julian's relations with Bertha in silence. In fact it became clear to him that Mr. Hardy, at any rate, had paid his visit with other than congratulatory intentions.

The door of the billiard room was scarcely shut when he *turned to his host.*

"It is, I suppose, unnecessary for me to ask you, Mr. Charlton," said he, "if the system upon which you and my wife's niece are living here is that which she has made no secret of holding—you are not married?"

"We are most certainly married," said Charlton; "not, perhaps, as people who regulate their actions in accordance with the prejudices—the artificial prejudices—of society regard being married, but most certainly married. I consider myself bound to your wife's niece by a stronger tie than any that can be woven by the Church or by the law of the land."

"No doubt," said Mr. Hardy. "But, you see, we are living in the midst of a society that is held together only by what you may call prejudices. Marriage is one of these—the legal ceremony of marriage, I should say, to put myself on your level. If it was not understood by the people who constitute a civilized community that, for a man and a woman to live together without their union being sanctioned by law—I do not say religion—was a social misdemeanor, society would not hold together for a day."

"That is begging the question, Mr. Hardy," said Julian.

"It is making a statement which is justified by facts," said Mr. Hardy. "Men daily desert their wives, in spite of the fact that the law punishes them for so doing. What would they do, might I ask you, if no penalty were attached to the offense—that is, if a man did not make himself amenable to the law by becoming a party to a civil contract involving certain obligations? Why, the world would be full of deserted wives."

"That is certainly taking a very cynical view of marriage as an institution, Mr. Hardy. What Bertha holds—what I hold—is that, if marriage is founded upon true affection, the tie will be regarded as sacred by the man and the woman without the necessity for any civil contract sanctioned by law and society being entered into. Pray light

your cigar ; I have no wish to discuss with you a point which cannot be appreciated except by those who have studied it in all its bearings, with a mind altogether free from prejudice."

"I have no desire to discuss it either, Mr. Charlton ; but I know what men and women are, and I know that men are mostly scoundrels, so far as women are concerned, and that women are mostly fools so far as men are concerned. Matters are bad enough even with the civil contract of marriage protecting society from the scoundrelism of man and from the folly of women ; what it would be if that fad of my wife's niece became common, I can guess."

"It strikes me, Mr. Hardy, that your reference to a fad scarcely comes gracefully from you."

"You believe me to be an old fool, I suppose ?"

"I believe you to be the secretary and founder of the Carnisolist Society—that is what you call it, I think."

"Never mind the Carnisolist Society, sir ; we must all live. I know that you both think that you are superior to the majority of the men and women in the world—that the laws which may be good enough for them, keeping them square and so forth, are not for you—that you will be a law unto yourselves, and set up as the pioneers of a new and select faith—a faith that will reform the world ; but I know that the hearts of human beings are very human—even of the most select human beings ; and I know that your new religion will break down under the first strain that is put on it. If you love that young woman truly, I pity you when you see her surrounded by attractive men—or, perhaps, by the side of one attractive man—and you feel that she is your wife only so long as it pleases her to be so. I pity her, too, when she sees you in the midst of a number of attractive women—or, perhaps, by the side of one particularly attractive woman—and she feels that you are bound to her by no

tie except one that is purely imaginative—I will not say illusive. Above all, I pity your children.”

“You are at liberty to take any view you please of the course we have adopted,” said Charlton when his visitor had spoken. “I am not sure that you can claim to be looked on as a wholly disinterested critic. I am not sure if that man Vicars, who was living at your house, gave you to understand what his views were in respect of your wife’s niece; but I fancy that, in removing Bertha out of his power and, perhaps, out of your power and away from your associations, I have done well. So far I have nothing to reproach myself with. Now, I decline to discuss the matter further with you or with anyone else.”

“You are right there, sir,” said Mr. Hardy. “The less you discuss the matter the better it will be—for yourself. But you cannot altogether crush down the consciousness, which you now and again have, of behaving like a scoundrel in failing to protect that young woman against herself—in being a party to that foolish fancy of hers. Now and again you feel a bit uneasy, I know; for a man cannot get rid of his conscience all in a moment, any more than a man can get rid of the rheumatism all at once. Conscience is the rheumatism of the soul—it never quite leaves one. Its twinges may not be felt for some time, but they come with increased force when they return—as return they will. Now I have said what I came here to say, and I can depart in peace.”

“You can,” said Julian. “You have spoken according to your lights, I dare say; but such lights as yours are rush-lights, Mr. Hardy.”

“Perhaps so, Mr. Charlton,” said Mr. Hardy. “But I take leave to hold that there are worse lights than rush-lights, sir. There is the *ignis fatuus*, for instance, that leads people up to the neck in a marsh; and there is the *St. Elmo light* that heralds a storm. I am better satisfied

to be guided by my poor rush-light than by a brilliant Will-o'-the-wisp or a corpse candle. You will think of what I have said when you are alone, and you will know that I have spoken the truth. Good-by to you, Mr. Charlton—good-by. You have a fine house, and you are rather more than less human than the majority of men who have lived in the world until they have passed their thirtieth year. Good-by !”

Nothing that Bertha could say to Mr. Hardy could induce him to prolong his visit. He left with his wife almost immediately. Julian did not ask him to remain, but he shook hands with him at parting.

He felt that this was a concession. It is not every man who will shake hands with another who has all but called him a scoundrel.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE SMILE AND THE FROWN.

WHEN Julian Charlton was alone he began to laugh at the idea of the founder of the carnisologists preaching a sermon upon the iniquity of yielding to what he called fads. Mr. Hardy was, he felt, in the position of the merchant who declared that honesty was the best policy, having tried the opposite and found that it did not answer.

But when his laugh was over he began to feel that his visitor had not proved himself by his conversation to be quite as great a fool as Julian fancied he was, knowing his connection with the carnisologists. He recollected that he himself had spoken to Bertha pretty much as Mr. Hardy had spoken to him, on the subject of marriage as a legal contract.

Had the past three weeks caused him to think differently on the subject, he asked himself. Had he really come to feel that Bertha was quite right? He had talked to Mr. Hardy of lights—had he himself acted according to his lights in bringing Bertha down to his house, and in keeping her there?

One of those twinges of which Mr. Hardy had also spoken made him writhe for a moment, nor did its effects wholly pass away when he recollected what his visitor had said regarding the possibility of his feeling ill at ease when he might chance to see Bertha surrounded by attractive men who would be charmed with her, and who might probably seek to charm her in return. He had known several attractive men, and the result of recalling them was not to reassure him. *He had known several attractive men who were dis-*

tinctly unscrupulous—in fact, it had never been known that they were attractive until they had proved themselves to be unscrupulous. Was it possible that he should feel uneasy watching Bertha surrounded by men determined to make themselves charming to her; or, what would be more fatal still, men who would be charming to her without exercising any determination in the matter?

He had a few moments of unquiet thought. Then he gave an exclamation of impatience.

He fancied that he had worked out the problem which he had set himself, and that the conclusion to which he had come—namely, that Mr. Hardy was an old fool—was a satisfactory one.

He was under the impression that Bertha's aunt had had a chat with her on the subject upon which Mr. Hardy had chosen to converse in the billiard room; but he did not put any inquiry to Bertha regarding the import of her interview alone with her aunt, and Bertha did not volunteer to tell him anything.

He had never seen her look more charming than on the afternoon of Lord Ashenthorpe's garden party. As he helped her up to the seat beside him on the high mail phaeton in which they were about to drive the six miles to Ashmead, he could not help feeling that Mr. Hardy had certainly shown himself to be a fool in suggesting that he, Charlton, would ever give Bertha cause for feeling all at ease, even when she might chance to see him by the side of the most attractive woman in society. What was the most attractive woman compared to Bertha?

And so he sent his pair of horses prancing down the avenue.

Lord Ashenthorpe was an under secretary for some department, and he had only run down to his place in Brackenshire for a few days during the Whitsun holidays—the *Church festival* occurred early this year. He was the eldest

son of the Marquis of Brackenshire, and he was one of the members for the county. He had gained a reputation with the government for being the best man to bewilder in a maze of words any member of the opposition who asked an awkward question. Such a gift is becoming more valuable every day in the House of Commons; consequently the value of Lord Ashenthorpe was appreciably increasing in the eyes of the government. They had even some thought of making him Chief Secretary for Ireland, in order to prevent the possibility of his faculty becoming dull through disuse. It would be certain to remain bright if he were to become Chief Secretary for Ireland.

He declined to accept the Irish portfolio. It was all very well for a man who was a bachelor, who was short-sighted, and who could look back on a youth well spent in the study of Christian evidences and golf to yawn the Irish members into a frenzy. For his part, Lord Ashenthorpe declared that, having none of these qualifications for success as chief secretary—he could not even yawn at will—he preferred remaining in a humbler sphere of usefulness.

The county made an imposing display at the garden party. Lord Ashenthorpe could not afford to neglect anyone who had electioneering interest. He looked forward to the time when all the licensed victualers within the constituency would be invited to such a function as a garden party, and when the chiefs of the miners' trade organization would be found choosing their partners for lawn tennis. He felt certain that if he could only get the leaders of the temperance party down to a garden party at Ashmead, he could convince them that he was perfectly sound on local option; but he also knew that the temperance leaders are more objectionable socially than the heads of the miners' organization whom he hoped to convince as to his soundness on the eight hours' question. He believed that he could *make them think* that he was sound even on a seven

hours' question or, if it came to that, on a six hours' question. Just as the young man who has no other means of subsistence than taking holy orders is ready to subscribe conscientiously not only to thirty-nine but to forty articles, if necessary, so the conscientious politician will, when the rumors of a general election are in the air, accept the six hours' principle to get the votes of the working men, who like every good thing except work. He will also express the soundest of views—that is to say, views that sound best—on local option, to try to catch the temperance party; but he will not refrain from hinting on the following day, in order to catch the publicans, what the government might reasonably be expected to do in abolishing the duty on beer—the natural beverage of the working man, especially when he is doing no work: when he is working he gets drunk, the Chancellor of the Exchequer assures us, upon rum.

Lord Ashenthorpe had confidence in his own ability to satisfy all shades of social politicians—that is to say, he knew that he could lead them one by one into a maze of words and leave them there. Modern politics he knew to be wholly a matter of promises. The most promising Liberal candidate is the candidate who is most liberal with his promises.

The first person seen by Bertha when she had dismounted from the phaeton was Lady Rushton, in the center of her group of plain daughters, with a husband that seemed a poor sort of thing behind her. She gave a gasp when she saw Bertha, and turned to Sir Edwin with uplifted hands and voice, calling his attention and the attention of everyone else within a considerable radius to the fact that Mr. Charlton and That Woman had actually had the effrontery to appear among respectable people.

Sir Edwin was a poor thing, but he was a man; and he came to the conclusion that That Woman was an extremely handsome woman, and that she dismounted from the high *phaeton* with infinite grace.

"Thank Heaven that you are not a statesman, Sir Edwin," said Lady Rushton as Bertha walked along by the side of Julian to where the wife of the under secretary was receiving her guests. "Thank Heaven that you are not a statesman."

"So I do," said Sir Edwin. "But why?"

"Why?" cried the matron. "You see *that*"—she jerked her sunshade in the direction of Bertha—"and yet you ask me why?"

"She seems actually pretty," said Sir Edwin. He felt in his secret heart that he would with resignation submit to be regarded as a statesman, if his duties included receiving many women so charming as That Woman who was now walking by the side of Charlton. "*Vera incessu patuit dea*," he murmured, observing her graceful gait.

"Pretty!" said Lady Rushton. "We do not criticise such creatures. Come away; we cannot talk of her before the children; the children shall not be contaminated if I can help it. Is it not monstrous to ask such people, simply because Charlton has influence in the county—*had* influence, I should rather say? He can have none now. The county was pure—invariably pure, until he brought that contamination here. And Lord Ashenthorpe invites them here! So much for the government! Sir Edwin, their days are numbered! Whatever we may be in England, we are pure. Our beloved sovereign has set us an example in this way—a noble example! England is not France, thank Heaven! And to think that that—wretch is wearing a costume that I know came from Mme. John Smith's of Regent Street, and must have cost fifty guineas, while my daughters—my pure daughters, poor things, are compelled to put up with the plainest of Tussores! Oh, this world! this world! Heaven be praised that I had time to spread her shame among most of the families who are present! Oh, to be a statesman!"

She had drawn her circle away from the front of the house and in the direction of one of the summerhouses—the chief feature of Ashmead—where tea was being served. The approach of the family of Rushton was sufficient to send flying all the youths who were in the neighborhood. They looked forward to such pleasures as were not wholly associated with plain daughters. Another matron was in the summerhouse partaking of tea, and into her ear Lady Rushton poured the story of That Woman's appearance. There was much uplifting of matronly hands and eyes and voices.

Meantime the under secretary and his wife had welcomed Charlton and Bertha. So they would have welcomed Baal and Ashtoreth if they had appeared decently dressed, and had influence with the electors.

Lady Ashenthorpe was a Personage. That she had become a Personage proved that she possessed a large amount of tact, and an infinite fund of smiles, no two alike. She had tact enough to perceive that Bertha was wearing a costume which, for beauty, was not likely to be matched in the county, and also that Bertha wore it as if she had never worn anything else all her life; consequently she brought forth out of her treasury her most gracious smile, and sunned Bertha with it for thirty seconds; at the expiration of that time another smile had been slipped over the first, as the dexterous manipulator of the magic lantern makes one picture dissolve into another. A new guest had come up and was being received by Lord Ashenthorpe.

The under secretary knew Julian Charlton well. He had heard that Julian had brought a wife home to the Court, consequently he had seen that Mrs. Charlton's name was put in the invitation card. He now found that the wife whom Charlton had brought home was an extremely pretty woman. He made up his mind that he would have half an *hour's conversation* with her in the course of the afternoon.

Perhaps he might even get his wife to ask her to dinner. He thought that, by judiciously exaggerating the influence that Charlton possessed in the county, Lady Ashenthorpe might consent to ask Mrs. Charlton to dinner.

Cyril Southcote was at hand, and the retreating figure of Marian Travers was seen in the distance as Julian and Bertha came out from the Presence.

"The world is not all so bitter, but her smile can make it sweet," said Cyril, gracefully indicating the Presence.

"A delightful woman," said Bertha. "Is not that Miss Travers who ran away as we came up?"

"You are right on both points, Mrs. Charlton," said Cyril. "The delightful woman is Lady Ashenthorpe, and the other is Miss Travers."

"I did not suggest anything like that," said Bertha. "Miss Travers is very delightful too. She ran away."

"Quite so," said Cyril. "I did not like to put it so strong myself; one can always depend on a woman for helping one out in a difficult matter such as this."

"Why did Miss Travers run away?" asked Bertha.

"A dear friend—a young girl—appeared in the distance in pink. A lowering of the eyebrows to make certain—a corresponding lifting of the hands—a cry of 'my beloved Polly!'—a school friend not seen for years, I learn, and I find myself alone."

"Oh, that is why she ran away?" said Bertha.

"Have I not given you a graphic explanation?" said Cyril.

"It could not be more graphic if you had invented it," said Bertha.

"You do not mean to imply——"

"That you invented the explanation? Certainly not. I only wish to imply that I regard you as an artist—a clever colorist is the exact phrase of the critics, I believe."

"I accept your commendation in a spirit of humility not

common among artists. And now admit to me in confidence that you are greatly impressed with our summer function—the common or garden party. My own belief is that it would be tolerable if it were not for the garden."

"And I think that it would be delightful if it were not for the party. I saw Lady Rushton. Lady Rushton rushed off when she saw me."

"Never mind Lady Rushton," interposed Julian. "We shall have to look forward to some years of life in this world apart from the patronage of Lady Rushton. Let us go down to the lawn; I must greet some of our neighbors whom I have not seen for nearly three years."

"The meeting and the greeting will be affecting," said Cyril. "I must find out what manner of schoolgirl is Miss Travers' 'dearest Polly'; I rather like schoolgirls, when they have passed the giggling stage and have reached the inquiring point. And yet it seems a pity that they should ever be led to inquire. Alas! the spirit of inquiry has proved fatal to many women since Eve set them the example. That which is forbidden is that which is inquired after. *Au revoir.*"

He walked off in the direction which Marian Travers had taken, leaving Bertha and Julian to make their way to the lawn, where many groups were to be seen endeavoring to hear as little of the band as possible. It is not possible to ignore a military band in full swing, but it can be abated in some measure by judicious conversation.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON SHORT SIGHT AND OTHER INFIRMITIES.

IT was, after all, Julian Charlton felt, the best thing that he could do—to walk boldly into the midst of the many groups composed almost exclusively of Brackenshire families. He felt that he had better give them to understand that he had no intention of coming furtively to the garden party or of stealing furtively about the grounds now that he had come. He knew, of course, that Lady Rushton had been describing to all the county the scene in which she had played the part of the virtuous heroine, in the drawing room at the Court; and he knew that the same lady was now talking to such of her friends as she could bring together upon the enormity of Lady Ashenthorpe's offense in asking to meet respectable and even virtuous people, a young woman who was living in the house with a man to whom she had not been married.

The best way to show that he was not afraid of anything that Lady Rushton might say was to face all the people on the lawn.

He did so.

Of one thing he was certain—there was no woman on the lawn who could compare with Bertha either in respect of beauty or dress. She was infinitely above the most distinguished of the county guests of Lady Ashenthorpe.

This he knew; but he was not quite convinced in his mind that the county ladies would be more disposed to be friendly with Bertha by reason of this fact. They might be disposed to forgive her for taking so remarkable a view of the sanctity of marriage, but it was unlikely that they would condone

the fact of her beauty, or, above all, the fact that she was the best dressed woman at Ashmead.

The way she was received on coming among them could not be regarded as cordial. Some of the ladies turned round and deliberately fled before her approach. Others who had been watching her, and plainly talking about her, turned their backs as she came near, and pointed out some object of interest in the distance—possibly an old school friend—to those who were beside them. Others who possessed the advantage of being short-sighted did not stir. They simply raised their *pince-nez* and, with their chins slightly elevated, stared at her through the glasses. The coldly critical insolence of these last mentioned people was worthy of the best London society, Julian felt. He knew that such a manifestation could be called for only in an extreme case. A lapse from the straight path of virtue would not have received such criticism, nor would the appearance of a face and figure so much more striking than their own. It was the costume which Mme. John Smith of Regent Street considered her noblest achievement of the season that demanded the most emphatic expression of the contempt of the county.

Bertha somewhat disconcerted a few of the ladies who gazed at her through spectacles mounted upon a tortoise-shell handle by laughing pleasantly in their faces.

"They do it so clumsily," she remarked, by no means inaudibly, to Julian. "They are poor imitations of Mr. Du Maurier's duchesses. They are playing at *tableaux vivants*, and showing themselves to be clumsy amateurs. Is this your county?"

"This is the county," said Julian. "It is Lord Ashen-thorpe's county—not mine, thank God."

He felt furious. He would not so much have minded the flight of some of the ladies, or the back-turning of others, but the insolent stare through the spectacles with the *tortoise-shell* handles was to him most exasperating.

Before he had gone across the lawn, however, he found that he was not likely to be allowed to finish his promenade alone by the side of Bertha. If the ladies turned their backs upon her and fled from her, the men—except such as had wives present—showed no desire to do the same. Julian found himself greeted by a number of men whom he had known before setting out on his travels. They greeted him with something of enthusiasm, and asked to be presented to Mrs. Charlton. Perhaps they laid a trifle too great emphasis upon the *Mrs. Charlton*. They also were amateurs.

Julian, without hesitation, presented at least half a dozen men—two of them the best *partis* in the county—to Bertha, and then he felt an arm on his own.

He found that it was the arm of a man who had been his most intimate of school and college friends.

"Come away from the madding crowd," whispered the man, "and tell me all that you have seen and all that you have learned by your travels—you can do it inside ten minutes, I can swear."

"Give me fifteen," said Julian, suffering himself to be led away by his friend.

He found that his friend did not want to hear about his travels, but was only anxious to tell Julian about his own. Julian was not quite so absorbed in his friend's narrative as to be incapable of noticing the effect which had been produced upon the ladies of the groups on the lawn when they perceived, by the aid of their spectacles, that Bertha was the center of a group of men—some of them the most angled-for men in the county. Eligible men are no more plentiful in Brackenshire than they are in any other county in England; consequently they are prized as they deserve to be. They have latterly shown a remarkable inclination to look for wives outside their own county, and this wildness is being made the subject of constant reproach by the matrons of

Brackenshire. Now when they saw that That Woman—Bertha was already familiarly known in this way—was attracting the attention of the most eligible men, simply because she had a good figure, and had been well treated by her dressmaker, they made no attempt to conceal their indignation.

Julian watched them with some malice in his heart, and not for a considerable time did he turn to where he had left Bertha.

She was not there.

The narrative of his own familiar friend became very tame, in spite of the fact that, although it dealt with shooting in the Rocky Mountains, it bordered on the probable every now and again.

Where was Bertha?

He followed the gaze of the ladies on the lawn—they were more indignant than ever—and he saw that Bertha was now standing apart from where she had been, and that only one man was by her side.

She was looking very frankly into the man's face, and he was replying with the frankest look of admiration possible to imagine on a face that is incapable of suggesting any emotion.

They were evidently mutually responsive, Julian perceived, and he knew that for them to be responsive meant that they were well pleased with one another. Suddenly he became once more conscious of that feeling which had come to him for the first time in his life when he had seen Eric Vicars grasp Bertha by both her hands on coming aboard the steamer in the dock.

It returned to him with the effect as of a sudden stab with a sharp instrument. He kept his eyes fixed upon her. She laughed at something that the man beside her had said, and her face lighted up at that moment.

He had an impulse to rush to her and take her away from

the man with whom she was conversing—on whom she was smiling. He had an impulse to make her climb to her place on the phaeton, and to drive her away to the Court out of sight of every human being but himself.

Again Bertha laughed. Then she said something that caused her companion to laugh. He did not look like a man who was given to laughter or smiles, but now he laughed.

The ladies on the lawn looked meaningly at one another, and smiled.

He saw them do so, and then his eyes returned to Bertha and her companion.

They were beginning to stroll round to where a seat had been made about the trunk of a weeping ash.

They were still absorbed in one another.

And all the time that he was observing this his friend was droning away about the Rocky Mountains and his marvelous escapes from bears. Charlton had become so accustomed to associate tergiversation with stories of bears that he had at last come to doubt the truth of the bear story told by David the son of Jesse. Bertha and her companion disappeared beneath the shadowy branches of the accommodating ash.

All at once there flashed upon the mind of Julian Charlton the thought:

"She is nothing to me more than any other woman."

It was quickly followed by a more disturbing thought still:

"I am nothing to her more than any other man."

Where had he heard those words before?

He recollected, after a time, that they had come from Mr. Hardy. He had in substance said, "I pity you when you see her by the side of some other man and reflect that she is bound to you by no tie."

Was it possible that that middle-aged man, who had no claim to be regarded as a gentleman, had displayed wisdom in *this* prophecy of his?

He had alluded to Mr. Hardy as an old fool. Could it be possible that, after all, it was he himself who had been the fool, while Mr. Hardy was the wise man?

He was beginning to fear that he was attaining to a complete knowledge of the meaning of that sensation which had come to him with the suddenness of a sharp stab, first when he had seen Eric Vicars grasping the two hands of Bertha, and again when he had seen Bertha smiling up to the face of the man by whose side she was now sitting, wholly hidden by the weeping ash.

Jealousy—jealousy—jealousy was the word that sounded in his ears like the strange rhythm of an incantation. It occurred to him that he was the victim of an incantation. He remembered one that he had read. The doom of the man—his name was Manfred—was in the line,

Thou shalt never be alone.

His doom was just the opposite, he felt: he was to be forever alone. He loved with all his soul that beautiful girl who had gone away from him—this was how he put the matter—with another man, and yet she was bound to him by no tie. He had no power to go to her and bring her back to his side.

He had talked freely of the indissoluble nature of the ties woven by love and love only. He had talked of that blessed mingling of souls which constituted a true marriage. What part did jealousy play in this scheme of social reform, he asked himself. If soul had mingled with soul, so that they were not two souls, but one, how could jealousy find a crevice in which to lodge?

"My God!" he cried inwardly. "Is it possible that I have been deceiving myself all along? Is it possible that I have deceived her all along? Is it possible that I have brought her into my house under a pretense—the pretense that I felt the truth of her theories regarding love and marriage?"

His thoughts smote him as if his soul had been a play-thing that may be buffeted for the pure enjoyment of the thing; and all the time there was that dull, monotonous, gnawing pain that forced him to keep his eyes fixed upon that natural dome of leafage beneath which Bertha and her companion were concealed.

"And so, my dear Julian, as I told you, the seventh grizzly was persuaded by the application of my third bullet to lie down quietly at the foot of the cañon; and then I found when I came to skin the brute—I'll show you the skin the first time you drop round—I found, I say, that there was only one bullet wound in the whole skin. The fact was that I had taken such good aim for the one vulnerable part the second bullet had simply come upon the first, pushing it in an inch or two, and the third upon the second; and so my forty-second grizzly——"

"What, you here, Mr. Charlton?" cried Marian Travers, who was passing behind where Julian and his bear-slaying friend were standing. "I hope you will put in a good word for Cyril with Sir Ecroyd. Cyril thinks he should like to become Administrator of the Calipash territory, and Sir Ecroyd has only to say the word and the matter is settled."

"And who, may I ask, is Sir Ecroyd?" said Julian.

"What!" cried Miss Travers, "did you not see Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh—the Minister of the Annexation Department? Why, everyone is talking of Mrs. Charlton's conquest."

"Is it Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh who is talking to my wife?" asked Julian.

"To be sure it is," said Marian. "Everyone was under the impression that Sir Ecroyd was a confirmed woman-hater, and that he was devoted to his duties to the exclusion of everything sentimental. You can imagine our astonishment when he asked Lord Ashenthorpe to present him to Mrs. Charlton. He is a guest at Ashmead for the Whitsuntide

recess. Where is he now—I should say, where are *they* now?"

"I really cannot say," said Julian. "I have been so deeply engrossed in the stories my friend Mr. Claxton has been telling me about how he shot—shot tigers in Kashmir—or was it hyenas in South Africa?—I had neither eyes nor ears for the incidents of this nether world."

"Oh, come," said the sporting friend, deprecating such flattery; "it really was only a singular incident regarding one of my bear hunts in the Rockies that I was telling him, Miss Travers—quite a trifle compared to what I could tell. If you have a minute to spare, perhaps——"

"Ah, I never have a minute to spare, Mr. Claxton," said Marian. "I prefer taking my fiction through the medium of a magazine or a scientific lecture. Pray do not forget to say the good word for poor Cyril, Mr. Charlton. They tell me that all the best government appointments are made in this way. To think that the Annexation Department should be the last to succumb! Sir Ecroyd is human, after all!"

With the pleasantest little laugh, she continued her stroll.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON THE HABITS OF AQUATIC FOWL.

"SHE is too clever a girl for my fancy, Julian," remarked the bear-slayer—to be more exact, the narrator of stories regarding the slaying of bears—when Miss Travers had passed. "I don't think it is good style for girls to be clever. They say she engaged herself to that fellow Southcote. I wish them luck of one another. Now, what's the matter with a stroll to the whiskey shanty, where I'll make you a genuine Hallelujah gin blizzard? I learned the secret in a poker saloon pretty far West—of which more anon."

"No," said Julian; "I want nothing in that line."

"In what line?"

"In that line—whatever it is."

"You are a trifle distracted, Julian."

"And you are the distracter, Jimmy."

"You are not yourself, Julian—that's what the matter with you."

"And you are quite yourself, Jimmy—that's what's the matter with you."

"You are unhappy."

"And you are unhealthy."

"Hallo, Charlton, I have been looking everywhere for you," said Lord Ashenthorpe, hurrying up at that moment.

"Where is Fairleigh?"

"I must ask that notice be given of that question," said Julian.

"Very good—very good, indeed," said the under secretary. "You have caught the trick of it, and, after all, that's half the battle in politics."

"What—tricks?"

"No; the official style, I mean. You must enter the House."

"Which?"

"My dear Charlton, there is only one House. To be sure, there is a place above to which we must all go some day," and Lord Ashenthorpe sighed.

"When we die? Theology doesn't say that it is absolutely necessary to go above."

"When our fathers die," said Lord Ashenthorpe. "But, thank Heaven, the marquis is as hale as ever. I will not be forced into the Upper Chamber just yet awhile."

"How easily one may be misled," said Charlton; "I really fancied that you were alluding to Paradise."

"Ah, because there is no knight there—not even a baronet—nothing under a baron," said Mr. Claxton, with a laugh that would be useful for blasting operations among the Rocky Mountains.

"The House of Lords is in some people's mind a foretaste of Paradise," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

"Just as the House of Commons is a foretaste of——"

"Come, now, Charlton, no theology at a garden party," said the under secretary. "Have you seen Sir Ecroyd?"

"I believe that Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh is with my wife under that tree," said Julian.

"What, you are not acquainted with him? Oh, come along, he will be delighted—so will you. A capital fellow! The very man for the Annexation Department!"

"Indeed! the very man for the Annexation Department," repeated Julian.

"He asked me to present him to your wife. That is why I am going to present you."

"That is hardly a sufficient reason, Lord Ashenthorpe," said Julian, suffering himself to be led toward the ash—the weeping ash.

"Why, your travels have made you cynical, Charlton," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

They parted the graceful boughs and got beneath the dome of leaves.

"Hullo! what's this?" cried the under secretary.

They were standing alone under the shade of the ash. The seat around the trunk bore neither Bertha nor Sir Ecroyd.

"The portfolio of the Annexation Department is no honorary one," remarked Julian.

"You said that Fairleigh was here with your wife. Perhaps it was another ash—there are plenty of ashes at Ashmead."

"And dust," said Julian. "Yes, I saw them on their way here."

"They have gone elsewhere since then—so much is certain," said the host. "Let us try some of the summerhouses."

Charlton allowed himself to be led away by Lord Ashenthorpe in the direction of a summerhouse, almost wholly concealed among the thick laurels of one of the mounds artificially introduced by the landscape gardener who had planned Ashmead.

A young couple were sitting within the summerhouse, doing their best not to look guilty. Charlton wondered if the parliamentary experience of the Minister of the Annexation Department would stand him in good stead were he to try and look comparatively innocent.

"These summerhouses, Charlton," said Lord Ashenthorpe, hurrying away, "have brought about more matches than the most designing of matrons. My wife said it would be an insult to your host to avoid making love in nooks such as these. Now where can those young things be?"

They were not in any of the summerhouses—the search for them in these nooks caused much incidental swearing *among the temporary settlers.*

Not for some time were they discovered.

They were standing close together by the brink of a piece of ornamental water. The Minister of the Annexation Department had his hands full—it was publicly said that he usually had his hands full. But now they were full of broken pieces of cake and other delicacies, and out of this store Bertha was feeding the water-fowl.

"What an idyl!" said Lord Ashenthorpe. "Upon my word, that picture should be enough to drive politics and ambition and—and a desire to be of service to one's country by keeping the opposition as long as possible on the opposition benches, out of one's head. What can the town give one that could compare with this? What does Horace say—ah, never mind."

"If Horace says 'never mind' he gives some excellent advice," said Sir Ecroyd, selecting a large and luscious piece of plum cake from his samples, and handing it to Bertha. "One sympathizes with the ducks," he continued. "But I suppose they can digest everything—even a plum cake like a thirty-two pound shot."

"Fairleigh, let me present to you Mr. Charlton," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

The Minister of the Annexation Department lifted his hat; Charlton did the same with his. Each man critically regarded the other for some seconds—exactly as if they had been rivals. Neither gave the least sign. They had lived in the world too long.

"Sir Ecroyd and I have done all the exploring of Ashmead," said Bertha, when she had thrown a sponge cake into the parted shells of a duck's beak. "We went under all the ash trees and into all the summerhouses—what charming places—they look so innocent—so country-like!—then we climbed one of the mounds, and, like—like stout Cortez upon that peak in Darien, stared at the pacific pond. Sir Ecroyd kindly got some cake for the ducks, and I have fed them."

"That brings us well up to date," said Lord Ashenthorpe. "You are to be thanked for having civilized Sir Ecroyd, Mrs. Charlton. To be civilized is to unbend occasionally. I never knew him unbend before to-day. Will you not complete your conversion of him by coming to dine with us *en famille* some night before next Thursday—the House, alas! resumes next Thursday?"

Bertha looked at Julian, waiting for him to reply.

He made no sign.

"I don't think that we have any engagements," said she at length. "Have you any plans for the week, Julian?"

"I cannot say at a moment's notice," he replied. "I fear we may have to run up to town for some days."

"My wife will write to-morrow," said Lord Ashenthorpe. "It would be a great pleasure to us all if you could come: Fairleigh must be civilized."

"Yes," said Sir Ecroyd. "I feel that it has become one of the necessities of life with me since I first tasted its sweetness half an hour ago. You will not be a party to my lapse, Mrs. Charlton. Do you know what it means to 'go Fantee'?"

"I never heard the expression," said Bertha.

"The natives on the west coast of Africa become Christians occasionally, when they have no other means of subsistence. They wear clothes—sometimes even coats. But the time comes when the old Adam is too strong for them, and they throw off everything wearable, and become wilder barbarians than they were originally. Will you see me 'go Fantee' before your eyes?"

"Certainly not," said Bertha. "I should run away."

"Then you would live with the consciousness that somewhere in the cold world a 'gone Fantee' man is wandering, whose fate you might have averted."

"All these speak like angels trumpet-tongued in favor of your dining with us," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

By this time Sir Ecroyd had brushed the sponge cake crumbs, together with an adhesive raisin or two and a streak of citron, from the front of his coat, and was strolling up the gravel path by the side of Bertha, Julian and their host following.

The band was braying away under the trees, the groups on the lawns were beginning to have a disorderly appearance, though the tennis players were as brisk as they had been in the early part of the afternoon. Some of the vehicles had already driven away, leaving Lady Ashenthorpe speeding the parting guest with smiles of a type fundamentally differing from those which had illumined her face in welcoming her friends—to be more exact, the persons who would be likely to add to the stability of her husband's seat in Parliament.

When Lord Ashenthorpe, Sir Ecroyd, Mr. Charlton, and Bertha formed a group on the borders of the lawn, the eyes of all the other groups were turned upon them, just as one may see in a picture of Mr. Sidney Cooper's all the cattle in a field turning to gaze upon a new arrival—just as one may see all the children in a family whose parents have run to seed turning stony gazes upon a human visitant to the room where they are playing trains with upturned sofas.

A member of the cabinet, even though he was not a member of one of the county families of Brackenshire, was still a Personage in the estimation of the guests at Ashmead, and for that Personage, accompanied by Lord Ashenthorpe, to be seen by the side of a person who was referred to as That Woman, was astounding. At this time the short-sighted ladies gazed without feeling the need for the lenses supplied by the optician. There is no necessity to employ spectacles with a handle in order to look at a cabinet minister.

Lady Rushton's group was the only one on the lawn that acted with courage and resolution. She huddled her plain daughters together, and drove them before her to where

their hostess was waiting—anxiously waiting, it must be confessed—to say good-by to her friends. Lady Rushton held her head at such an elevation as enabled her to see more of the surrounding foliage of the trees than of the groups on the lawn.

"I think," said Charlton, "that is our machine coming up the drive. My dear, Lady Ashenthorpe is waiting on the terrace steps."

"You have a drive of six miles to the Court, have you not, Charlton?" said Lord Ashenthorpe.

"Quite six miles. I am not so sure about the rain keeping off for another hour," said Charlton.

"The only wonder is that it has not been raining all the afternoon," said the host. "Well, we will not say good-by, only *au revoir*."

"That would please me very much more," said Bertha. "I have not spent a pleasanter afternoon since I came to England."

"Your missionary efforts bring their own reward, Mrs. Charlton," said Sir Ecroyd. "But pray remember what I said about the perils of my lapsing into the Fantee once more. I have no confidence in myself."

"I shall use every effort to avert such a disaster," cried Bertha.

"My wife will call upon you, if you do not carry out your threat of going to town," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

"It will be very good of Lady Ashenthorpe," said Charlton.

To return *en amateur* the professional smiles of their hostess occupied only a few minutes. Then Bertha and Julian were driving rapidly down the avenue.

"She is distinctly the most beautiful creature I have ever seen," said Sir Ecroyd. "If I had met her twenty years ago, I would have asked her to be my wife."

Lord Ashenthorpe laughed sagely.

"My dear Fairleigh, you would have done nothing of the sort," said he.

"I assure you I would. Great Heavens, man, don't you fancy that I know my own mind?"

"Yes, I fancy you do know your own mind. 'Mind'—yes, it has come to that. You say 'mind' now, but twenty years ago you would have said 'heart.' Mark the difference. You say you know your own mind regarding that bright young thing. So you do. She appeals to your mind. But what appeals to the mind of a cabinet minister of forty-three is not what appeals to the heart of a stripling of twenty-three. So much is certain. Therefore I say that you would not have wanted to make her your wife twenty years ago. Twenty years ago your heart was incapable of appreciating what your mind appreciates now. You would not have appreciated that young woman when you were twenty-three years of age."

"When I said 'mind' just now," remarked Sir Ecroyd, "I was merely paying a just tribute to modern scientific research. Love has been proved to be the result of cerebration—perhaps unconscious cerebration—perhaps automatic cerebration. The affecting of the heart is the natural sequence of the phenomena of the brain in such cases—the heart is by no means the seat of the origin of that incident known as love. If anyone were to talk about the heart of a cabinet minister nowadays, those who heard the phrase would put their tongues in their cheeks. It would make a capital cry for the opposition. 'What about that heart?' we should hear on all sides when that minister rose to advocate a coercive measure. That is why I made use of the word 'mind.'"

"But I tell you the mind has nothing to do with the matter."

"That is because you are an under secretary, Ashen-thorpe. There is nothing absurd about the idea of an

under secretary with a heart. Lady Ashenthorpe is coming toward us."

"Here is Ecroyd Fairleigh, Grace," said Lord Ashenthorpe; "and he has been feeding the ducks and the drakes in the pond all the afternoon by the side of Mrs. Charlton."

"That was very pretty on the part of Sir Ecroyd," said Lady Ashenthorpe.

"And on the part of Mrs. Charlton," said the minister.

"No doubt; but you cannot guess what I have been hearing regarding that charming young person. She is not married to Mr. Charlton."

"What!" cried Lord Ashenthorpe.

"She is no more married to him than I am. She holds certain terribly advanced theories regarding marriage, and all that sort of thing, and she and Mr. Charlton made it up between them on the steamer that brought them from the Cape that they would not go through any ceremony of marriage. How amusing, is it not?"

"Amusing? Good God! Grace, I have just insisted on their coming to dine with us some night next week."

Lady Ashenthorpe's smile vanished.

Lord Ashenthorpe looked imploringly toward Sir Ecroyd.

Sir Ecroyd's face was as impassive as it always was when the opposition were clamoring for a complete explanation regarding the treatment of the aborigines in some newly annexed territory.

"By Heavens," thought Lord Ashenthorpe, "that man is thinking that he has a chance of marrying that bright young thing yet."

And so he was.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE FIRST CLOUD.

WHILE this little scene was taking place on the terrace steps at Ashmead, Julian was sitting in chilling silence by the side of Bertha in the mail phaeton, listening to her account of how amusing Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh had been. The idea of his being a cabinet minister was quite absurd, she declared. There was no guile in him. (She did not seem to perceive the defective logic of her deduction). He had much more of a boy's nature in him than Charlie Barham, the midshipman, seemed to have possessed, she declared; and yet he appeared to know everything—even where General Boulanger got the money, and what the last speech of the leader of the opposition meant. He had invented a new game, she said—not the leader of the opposition, who sticks to the old—but Sir Ecroyd. You get a hat, and, standing at a distance of four yards, you try to throw shillings into it. The coins that fail to effect a lodgment are left lying outside until they are gathered up by the player whose shilling gets into the hat. Sir Ecroyd said that he invented the game while waiting for the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary at a cabinet council at Downing Street. All the members played at it except the Secretary for Scotland, who was a Presbyterian; and when the two absent ministers arrived and had the game explained to them, they became so interested in it, they took off their coats and joined in. They continued playing till six o'clock, when the council adjourned; and the newspapers, who were *supposed* to know all about cabinet councils, wrote leading *articles* explaining that a more successful council had not

taken place during the session, and assuring their readers that it was mainly devoted to a financial question, not wholly unconnected with the buying out of the Irish landlords. Sir Ecroyd had declared to her, Bertha said, that it was certainly the most successful council he had ever attended, for he had made eleven shillings in the course of the afternoon. He should have made very much more, only that the Scotch secretary, who had eventually become interested in the game, joined in at a time when nine shillings remained outside the hat—in the pool, so to speak. He said he had not a shilling about him, but if they would let him throw a sixpence instead he would join in. The Chancellor of the Exchequer naturally held out for the shilling, but all the others agreed to let the sixpence be thrown. The first throw was lucky, and the Scotch minister picked up the nine shillings and his own sixpence, and said it was time to go home, otherwise the people might think that there were serious dissensions in the cabinet.

“I asked him if cabinet councils were always like that,” continued Bertha; “and he said that that one was quite an exception. The fact was that some of the ministers were old and not particularly brisk on their legs. The younger think it their duty to give way in all matters to them, and only introduce something in which they can all join on a common footing. On the whole, Sir Ecroyd said he thought that the safest thing for a cabinet council was a pen dart game. They get a sheet of thick paper and draw on it an outline of the leader of the opposition. They put it on a blotting pad, and lean it up against a dispatch box, and then throw quill pens at it, which always fly point foremost. They lay down a shilling for every shot, and whoever succeeds in hitting him on the mouth gets the pool. They call the game Shutting up the Opposition. It is extremely popular. I never was so much amused in all my life,” continued Bertha. “Sir Ecroyd told it all with such solemnity,

and entreating me every now and again not to let anyone know that he had told me."

She laughed, but Julian did not laugh. He drove steadily on, his face remaining as solemn as Sir Ecroyd's could possibly have been while communicating the secrets of the cabinet councils to Bertha.

She felt repressed and chilled by his solemnity. It was out of place, she thought. It appeared to her that something had occurred to put him out during the day. She wondered what it could be. Surely he was not foolish enough to think that she was annoyed at the insolent way in which the county ladies with the handled spectacles had stared at her!

He scarcely exchanged a word with her while they were driving to the Court, and at dinner also he was silent.

Well, if he meant to be serious, she would be sympathetic with his mood, she thought; so she began to talk to him on a subject to which she had been giving serious consideration during some days.

"I want to have your opinion regarding Eric Vicars," she said, when they were in the drawing room after dinner. The topic being a serious one was, she believed, very happily chosen by her.

He lifted his head up suddenly, and looked at her steadily. She had never seen such an expression on his face before. It was a searching look—a look of suspicion—of distrust, it seemed to her.

"Why should you look at me in that way?" she asked, laying her hand on the back of one of his.

"What is my opinion worth to you, when you are thinking of that man?" said he. "You know it is worth nothing."

"That is distinctly unkind on your part, Julian," said she. "It is almost cruel of you to talk to me like that. I know *you have shown yourself once before to be sensitive on the*

question of my money ; and I know that you are so from a feeling of honor. You do not wish anyone to do you the injustice of thinking of you as a fortune hunter. But——”

“Do not let us talk any more on the subject,” said he. “We are fast approaching that stage of bickering which is usually supposed to be the chronic state of those who commence with great connubial bliss, as it is called.”

“There is no reason to change the topic,” she replied gently. “Do not fancy, for a moment, my dearest, that I fall short in appreciating the delicacy—the sense of honor which causes you to wish to avoid the implication of a partnership in my money. But I do not think that you should allow your sense of honor to prevent your giving me some advice. I believe that my father meant to do something more for Eric than he did, and I have been rather uneasy in consequence. My aunt takes the same view of the matter as I do—she told me so when she was here, and you were in the smoking room. Now, do you not think that, as there are so many large farms vacant in England, I might buy one and set Eric up in it, giving him a chance of being the pioneer of my plan for recruiting agricultural England from the colonies ?”

“For God’s sake,” said he, rising and making a deprecatory motion with his hands—“for God’s sake, let us hear nothing more about systems and plans and principles. I think we have had enough of them. Do what you please with your money—it is all yours. I never want to see a penny of it. Throw it away upon your old friend Eric, or upon your new friend Sir Ecroyd, if you wish ; all I beg of you is not to try to make me a party to any more schemes.”

He was standing with his back to the fireplace, and she was seated on a gilt couch at his left—the very sofa where, only a few weeks before, he had fancied her sitting. He *had spoken without any expression of anger in his voice,*

only in a measured way, and with more than a trace of bitterness.

There was a long pause in the room.

Then she got up from her seat, and, without a word, left the drawing room. To reach the door she had to pass through the *portière* drawn between tall pillars. Only at the moment of moving the curtain to one side did she look toward him. He remained with his hands behind his back at the fireplace, making no sign. He heard the door open and close.

Then he felt alone.

It was the first cloud.

It was a curious satisfaction that he felt—very curious and extremely evanescent.

Had he treated her badly? or had she treated him badly?

Surely he was the ill-treated one. Why had she gone away with Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh? Why had she thought it well to leave the protecting shade of the weeping ash? Why had she allowed Sir Ecroyd to make up a portion of that extremely effective picture which had come before his eyes and the eyes of Lord Ashenthorpe at the ornamental water? It was quite monstrous that she should get on such friendly terms with him as allowed her to employ him in a way that involved the becrumbling of his waistcoat. If he had been her most intimate friend, she could not have treated him in a more confidential way. The exact connection between crumbs and confidences Julian might have had some difficulty in defining, but he perceived that such a subtle connection existed the moment he saw the crumbs on the waistcoat of the Minister of the Annexation Department.

Why had she then kept talking about him all the time they were driving home, if she was not fascinated by him, *as the minister* clearly was by her?

That was a question which could only be answered in one way ; and it was because he felt that he could answer it without hesitation, he came to the conclusion that he did well to be angry.

But then he reflected—as he had done more than once lately—that if she had been fascinated by the Minister of Annexation, there was no reason in the world why she should not go to him, and, if she wished, and the minister wished, marry him. If she were once married to Sir Ecroyd she would never be able to return to the Court.

Where was she at the very moment he was thinking about her? Perhaps she was putting on her hat in order to set out for Ashmead to throw herself into the arms of the minister.

If that was her intention there was no power that he could bring to his aid to prevent her from realizing it. She was bound to him by no tie—that was what he now felt, as he had often done before.

Why had he not remembered this before speaking to her such words as had so deeply offended her ?

Then the thought occurred to him that it was only when she had talked about Eric Vicars that he had become exasperated. He hated Vicars as he had never before hated any man. He had hated him from the moment he had appeared on the dock side.

Was it possible that he was jealous both of the cabinet minister and the ex-overseer ?

The notion was ridiculous.

Of this fact he was well aware, but, unfortunately, the consciousness that a certain notion is ridiculous is by no means incompatible with the possession of this notion by a man.

Jealousy is madness—this he knew. But there is another passion that “doth work like madness in the brain.” This is “*to be wroth with one we love.*” Then indeed he

was doubly mad. He was insanely jealous of two men, and he was wroth with the woman whom he loved as he had never loved any human being. He had been wroth with her, and now she had left him. He was standing alone in the great room, staring at the space in the heavy *portière* through which she had passed. The broken line of the drapery seemed to him to retain something of the figure that had passed through the space into the dimness beyond. Would he ever see that figure again? It was exquisite, but it had passed from him forever.

He turned away from the fireplace and threw himself down on the sofa where she had rested.

He began to wonder how it was that he had never had a suspicion of jealousy of her so long as they had been together aboard the steamer! He had daily seen her sitting beside, and talking with, men who were certainly as fascinating as the cattle driver, and much more fascinating than the cabinet minister. (To that distorted vision of the jealous man the figure of Eric Vicars was actually more imposing than the figure of Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh.) How was it that he had then felt absolutely secure of her love, whereas now he could not see her beside a man without being in agony?

The problem was too much for him.

He buried his face in his hands, overcome with that dread feeling of loneliness which was the result of all his thoughts. He was alone. All his thoughts led him into the overwhelming darkness of that sensation.

Was it a fancy due to his mood, that a hand was resting on his shoulder? With his face still bent down to one hand, he put the other up to his shoulder. It touched a soft hand wearing a ring.

"Julian, dear Julian, I am so sorry. I should have remembered that you do not wish that man's name mentioned. I will not do so again. Forgive me, dearest, and let this little cloud float away forever."

"Forgive you, Bertha? Oh, my love, my love, it is I who need your forgiveness. How could I ever say such cruel words to you? How could I ever lead you to believe that I doubted you? Do not think it, dearest. Do not believe that I could ever doubt you."

She moved away at the words with a little shudder, and repeated them as if she had not caught their import.

"*You* to doubt *me*—*you* to doubt *me*?"

"Never, Bertha—never!" he cried. "I do not doubt your truth now, my beloved!"

"Not now—*now*?" she repeated.

"Never—never until the end of time!" he said, catching her hand. "Say that the cloud is past, Bertha—say that it is past!"

"Yes, it is past," she said gently, almost sadly.

He clasped her hand and kissed her.

She responded neither to the clasp nor the kiss.

Was it possible that her words "*it is past*" did not refer to the cloud?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE LOCUST AS A COMESTIBLE.

THERE is scarcely anything more humiliating to persons of intelligence—that is, to ourselves—than to be made the subject of hostile prophecy by men whom we believe to be old fools. It was, possibly, this fact that caused the death rate among the Hebrew prophets to reach such a high percentage. One could hardly imagine a greater source of irritation than a prophet turning up every now and again, just when things were becoming pleasant—when the nightingales were singing around the summer palaces and the eleven hundredth wife was turning out a success—and prophesying unpleasant things in the presence of a monarch who preferred the scents of the harem to those of the wilderness. The music of the sackbut, the psaltery, and the dulcimer, accompanying the songs of the singing girls, arranged for a chorus of female voices by that distinguished composer the chief musician upon Jonath-Element-Rechokim, was certainly preferable to the fervid and disturbing recitatives of those fierce, unkempt men detestably zealous, who came straight from their meals of locusts, or some other abomination of the desert, and droned out the effects of their dyspepsia in the presence of the king. The rigid adherence to the locust as an article of diet produced several prophets of the highest order of dyspeptics.

The worst of the matter was that they were so frequently right, though few of them were sufficiently nimble in avoiding javelins to be in a position to live to see their predictions *realized*. It speaks volumes in favor of the assumption that

Nebuchadnezzar was a good-natured man, that he did not order the immediate slaughter of the person who prophesied that he should become the most distinguished vegetarian that the world has ever known.

Julian Charlton felt greatly irritated when he reflected that the prediction of Mr. Matthew Hardy had been in some measure realized, so far as he was concerned.

The founder of the carnisologists had predicted that Charlton would be a man to be pitied when he should see Bertha by the side of a fascinating man, and feel that she was bound to him, Julian Charlton, by no tie.

Charlton felt himself to be a man of intelligence, and he believed Mr. Hardy to be an old fool ; consequently he was greatly irritated to be obliged to confess that the prophet Hardy had predicted truly.

It should be his own task, Charlton resolved, to prevent the possibility of Mr. Hardy's implied prophecy becoming a rule of his life. What a frightful thing it would be if it were to be realized every time he might see Bertha by the side of a fascinating man, he thought. To be sure, fascinating men had not been very numerous, so far as Bertha was concerned, otherwise she would have yielded to one of them years before he, Julian, had met her.

Here a thought laid a cold finger upon him, so to speak. Bertha had known Eric Vicars years before she had mounted that stairway made up the rocks of St. Helena. Julian knew that there is nothing more fatal than an early attachment, especially when one of the attached persons remains faithful to the early contract. Such monuments of fidelity are very irritating. The man who remains faithful to the woman he has loved in childhood is neither picturesque nor useful.

Charlton had an idea that the majority of women rather like to have near them the men who remain faithful to *them from childhood*. A soldier likes to wear his medals

—they represent certain victories of the past; and the faithful men will bear to be regarded as evidences of early triumphs.

He wondered if Bertha was inclined to regard Eric Vicars in this light.

Whether or not she was so inclined, it was certain that this man Vicars meant that it should be generally understood that he was a monument of fidelity, and that Bertha had behaved badly to him.

The question that then remained was, did Bertha feel that she had behaved badly to him?

If she did not, why should she betray so great an anxiety to do something for him? Why should she—a refined, intellectual woman—desire to do anything for a common loafer, such as Vicars undoubtedly was? Why should she desire to see him established in a farm in the neighborhood of the Court?

These inquiries which he put to himself were very disquieting. He felt that if he were married to Bertha they would not cause him a moment's uneasiness; but however she might regard the bond existing between herself and her husband—as she called him—he felt that it was a very different tie from the marriage bond.

It was appalling to reflect that, only a few weeks before, he had been talking about the beauty of a spiritual marriage—a union that was dependent upon no earthly bond, but upon that mystic blending of two souls in one. Bertha had convinced him of the reality of the spiritual marriage, though he remembered how he had held out bravely for the legal ceremony. Why had he not remained steadfast in this matter? He recollected how he had seen Eric Vicars holding Bertha's two hands in his own. That had caused his resolution to assume another shape. It had caused him to feel that he would be worse than a fool if he *were to leave her in the power of such a man as was hold-*

ing her hands in his own, with a detestable air of proprietorship. Yes, it was Eric Vicars who had caused him to yield to Bertha. He could not forget that, and he hated the man the more on this account.

The first cloud had passed away, but it had left some effects behind it. The seeds of suspicion and distrust had obtained some moisture from it, and there was every promise of a plentiful crop in the course of time. Bertha was not exactly the same, he could perceive. She was making noble efforts to be exactly the same, but she was not quite succeeding. The fact that she found it necessary to make such efforts proved to him that she was conscious that a change had taken place in her feelings, so far as he was concerned.

Could it be possible that she, too, was feeling that the union of souls did not contain the elements of stability? He did not venture to ask her.

During the next few days, several visitors appeared at the Court. Curiously enough, they were all men. Several of them Charlton had known before he had set out on his travels. Some of them had been presented to Bertha on the lawn at Ashmead, previous to the arrival of Sir Ecroyd to eclipse all lesser lights. They were for the most part pleasant fellows, with a nice appreciation of "form." They did not look at it from a standpoint of art, but from the standpoint of a public school. They hoped Mrs. Charlton would enjoy the hunting when October came. They thought that they could show her some fun. Few districts were so conscientiously hunted as the Brackenthorpe neighborhood. Things were not done by halves here, they assured her. Eight years ago a farmer had been almost proved to have shot a fox, simply because it carried off some seventeen prize fowl of his, they told her. As the deed had almost been proved against him, he had been given to *understand* that the sooner he cleared off the

better it would be for himself. You see it had almost been proved against him, they assured Bertha, when she had suggested a possible injustice.

"And what became of him?" she inquired.

"He died in the workhouse three years afterward," was the answer. "Oh, yes! make no mistake; the fellows of the hunt are really conscientious men. They stand no damn nonsense."

Bertha looked at the speaker who had given her the assurance. There was a light in her eyes that an ordinary man would have been able to interpret without much difficulty. The conscientious fox-hunter did not show himself equal to the task of interpretation. He shook his head in a knowing way, and repeated his last assertion:

"Yes, we stand no damn nonsense; do we, Charlton?"

Without waiting to hear whether Julian confirmed the statement, or suggested the possibility of its being founded upon a misapprehension, Bertha turned her back directly upon the man, and began to talk to another.

The other was a humorist as well as a member of a county family; the two are not invariably found in intimate association. He was also something of a sad young dog, he believed, and he hoped yet to convince some people that he really was one.

Oh, no, he assured Bertha, he was not often so long away from town as he had been. It was a beastly shame, he admitted, to have to remain for another fortnight in a place where so little fun was to be had in the summer. For a fellow who had accustomed himself to town life, and who had also accustomed the people of the town to his presence every season, it was no joke to have to remain in the country for a whole month. In a low voice he expressed his curiosity to know if Bertha had ever heard of the Jollity Theater.

"I have never heard of it. What is its specialty?"

The youth screwed up his eyes and his mouth into the knowing smile of the young dog ; he glanced cautiously around and then bent his head as close to Bertha's as was possible, before whispering with every suggestion of being a very naughty man :

"Legs!" and then he lay back in fits at his own light humor. It was very airy, he felt ; and of course it was a bit naughty—what humor is worth anything that is not a bit naughty? "They all like it, these young married ones," he was accustomed to explain to those dull people who suggested that, now and again, he went a little too far in his humor.

Bertha looked at the humorist for a few moments, and then quietly rose and left the room.

"I think I had better leave your friends with you," she said to Julian as she rose.

There was a considerable silence in the room after her departure. The visitors glanced at one another, and then at Charlton.

"It is wonderful," said Charlton, "how quickly things change even in so slow a county as Brackenshire. Since I have returned I have found myself actually old-fashioned."

"Well, maybe you are a bit off, old man," said one of his visitors ; "but, never mind ; we make all allowances for you. A couple of years' travel is bound to make the best of fellows a trifle cramped in his notions, you know."

"I dare say," said Charlton. "But if it has become the right thing to swear in the presence of the lady whom you are visiting, and with whom you are talking, I am rather glad I took to traveling, and I am inclined to think that I shall take to it again."

"A man may now and again make a slip like that, without any harm coming of it," said the fox-hunter.

"That is quite true," said Charlton. "But it was always the custom that a man making such a slip apologized for it

to the lady. Of course I know that you would not do anything that was not strictly the right thing ; so I take it for granted that it has become quite usual to swear in the course of conversation with a lady. That is why I say that I think it highly probable that I shall go abroad again."

After another silence, someone suggested that it would be a pity not to shoot the well-known Court coverts in the autumn. A few remarks regarding poachers were made, and gradually the visitors dispersed, leaving Julian to his own reflections.

CHAPTER XI.

ON FRENCH PORCELAIN.

HIS reflections were not of a very pleasing type. He knew that the men who had just left him had heard discussed in their own households the important question as to whether Bertha should be visited or left alone with the man whom she called her husband. He knew that, while the womenkind in each family had declared that nothing in the world would induce them to visit That Woman, the menkind had considered that it would be something of the nature of a good lark to take a run across to the Court, and have a chat with the young thing who was living there. It would be nearly as good as taking a trip to France, they thought. Charlton knew perfectly well that these Brackenshire young men had regarded the trip to the Court as being on a level of fastness with an excursion to Paris. He knew that some of them at least, would boast of having had "no end of a lark with that pretty young thing that Charlton had got hold of." To talk to such men about the mystic beauty of spiritual marriage would be as ridiculous as to talk of the advantages of decency and repose to General Booth, or of the fascinations of the Westminster Confession to Colonel Ingersoll.

He did not hear what it was that the humorist had said to drive Bertha from the room ; but he had not failed to notice the jaunty air of fastness that each of the visitors affected. He was well aware that none of them would have ventured to talk about any particular line of conduct being "damn nonsense" in the presence of the wife of any of their own *relations, unless the lady had been the first to swear—by no*

means an unlikely contingency, for Brackenshire contained many hunting ladies who could bring the blush of shame to the faces of their own grooms—a feat in itself—with their strong language.

Well, the fast young men had gone to their homes somewhat tardily; and no doubt they would entertain their mothers and sisters with an account of how the woman who was living at the Court had presumed to give herself the airs of a prude. How the mothers and sisters would hold up their hands and raise their eyebrows at the notion of That Woman pretending to have something of the prude about her! The mothers and the sisters, who will not visit a young woman whom they believe to belong to a naughty world, are always delighted to learn all that can be told them—sometimes even more—regarding the naughty people and their naughty ways.

Naughtiness may be read about, may be seen on the stage, may be imitated in dress, may be stared at through spectacles with handles, but it must on no account be visited.

Charlton made up his mind that he would take Bertha to London as soon as possible. He was tired of the county and the county people. In London they could have as much society as they wished—the society of men and women whose names were known in the world—who had other aims in life beside killing foxes. He knew that in London Bertha would be visited, and that cards in heaps would arrive for her by every post, inviting her to dinners, to dances, to private concerts, to street Arab missions, to woman's suffrage meetings, to hypnotizing *séances*, to scientific *conversazioni*, to boating parties, to first nights at the plays, to Exeter Hall meetings, and to all those delightful functions of a London season.

He knew that people in London are glad to receive strangers on their own merits; and in Bertha's case the

merits were beauty, brightness, intelligence, freshness, and nearly twelve thousand pounds a year.

While these reflections were coming to him, Bertha entered the room, and glanced around.

He could see that her eyes had a delicate border of pink about them. She had been weeping.

"My beloved!" said he, putting his arm about her. "Why should you be cut up because a country jackanapes endeavors to impress you with the idea that he is a man about town? They are gone—those young asses—and I can promise you that you will not be troubled with them again."

"Why should they talk in that way to me—just as if I were a man, and as if I had known them all my life?" said Bertha.

He knew quite well what was the only answer he could make to her. But how could he tell her that it was because it was taken for granted that she was occupying the same house with a man who was not her husband? Women who do this are the women in whose presence men do not modulate their voices or their expressions.

"My dearest, they are country fools," said he. "They are no more offensive than their mothers or their sisters."

"If these are examples of your Brackenshire people, I shall go back to one of my sheep-runs. Among the shepherds and the shearers and stock keepers I am certain to be among gentlemen—men with good hearts and good sense—very different from those silly, bragging boys."

"No, my love, we shall not go to the wilds of Australia—we shall go to the wilds of London instead. There I promise you that you shall have all the intellect of the town at your feet."

He knew that if her beauty failed to bring the intellect of the town to her feet, the fact of her possessing about

twelve thousand pounds a year would do it, especially if she continued buying the products of intellect at the prices suggested by the producers.

"I do not want the intellect at my feet," she said. "I only want to live without being subjected to the insults of such men as were here just now. Why, in driving in the cattle to the stockyards, the men never swore when I was at hand."

"And yet I believe that that is a work that is mainly accomplished by judicious vituperation," said Julian.

"Do not laugh," said she, with a pained look. "I feel just now as if nothing is left for me but to return to Australia—to go home."

"Bertha, my wife, this is your home," said he. "You must never think of any place but this as your home now. We shall stand side by side to the end."

They had not yet been a month together, and he was talking about the end coming. This was the language of the garrison of a fortress that is being besieged. The men talk bravely about standing side by side until the end comes, knowing that the end is not far off.

Some moments passed before she spoke.

"Yes," she cried bravely; "we stand together, you and I—to the end—to the end!"

"To the end!" he repeated, with her hand in his.

She had spoken bravely—but he felt that he would rather she had spoken lovingly. Was she beginning to find out that the condition of marriage—leaving aside altogether the question of the marriage ceremony—was more or less of a compromise?

Before he had dropped her hand, the sound of wheels and hoofs was heard on the drive.

"More visitors!" said Bertha with a wearied look.

He glanced out of the window. The vehicle had been *pulled up* at the porch. It was hidden by the projecting

l; but he could see the horses' heads, and the crest on harness.

"It is the Ashenthorpes' phaeton," said he. "Lady Ashenthorpe has kept the promise which her husband made; she has come to pay you a visit."

In a few seconds the footman announced Lord Ashenthorpe and Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh.

The two men entered, and the door was closed.

Lady Ashenthorpe had not come.

It only took Lord Ashenthorpe a few minutes to explain, precisely the same tone he adopted when replying on half of the Treasury to a question put by a querulous opposition—a question demanding in a reply the exercise of tact, courage, and a conscientious abandonment of conscientiousness—why Lady Ashenthorpe had not come.

"My poor wife—a victim to hay fever," said Lord Ashenthorpe. "It is really very melancholy, Charlton. We came down here for a few days' complete rest—for a whiff of the meadow across the footlights, so to speak—for, my dear Charlton, we are more or less play-actors."

"We are indeed," acquiesced Charlton.

"Politicians are not exempted," said Lord Ashenthorpe.

"Oh, no, no, that is impossible," said Julian. "Pardon my interruption: you were at 'whiff of the meadow.'"

"Ah, of course. Yes, I say it is very hard. The whiff of the meadow that should do us all the good in the world knocks my wife up for days. She is very sorry that she found it impossible to accompany me to-day, but we agreed that it would be madness for her to make the attempt. And the dinner party—I was hoping that she might nerve herself for the little party that I had been promising myself; but it would be too melancholy—a dinner party without a hostess."

"It would indeed," acquiesced Charlton.

"But you said you would be in town for the remainder

of the season, did you not? Then the dinner is not abandoned, only postponed. You will let me have your address—we have dinners almost every Wednesday—that is my free night. Thank Heaven, we have still our Wednesdays and Saturdays. You will only meet congenial souls—not a politician among them—only Fairleigh."

"He is a member of the cabinet, consequently exempted from the list of politicians."

"Of course—in that sense. You will find him congenial, so will your—ah—Mrs. Charlton. You see they have resumed their conversation which we interrupted at the pond. Did you see the paragraph that appeared in that iniquitous print *Thistledown* regarding the pond business? It is really monstrous that a man cannot ask a few friends to his place for an hour or two without finding afterward that some of them are making 'copy' for these wretched prints that spring up around us and die away after a month or two."

"I never heard of *Thistledown*," said Julian. "What did it say?"

"Some trash about the fondness of some members of the government for wild fowl," replied Lord Ashenthorpe. "After alluding to the fact that Fairleigh was feeding the ducks all the afternoon, it twisted the thing round so as to suggest that the fondness for wild fowl may be carried too far by any government. Then it alluded to our East African business as a wild-goose chase, and declared that our love for ornithology was so marked that we made ducks and drakes of everything we attempted to do. It went on in that sickening style for half a page," added the under secretary.

While Julian Charlton was listening to the indignant remarks of Lord Ashenthorpe, he was casually watching Sir Ecroyd examining, by the side of Bertha, one of the famous Sèvres vases for which, in the eyes of collectors, the Court *was the shrine*.

He saw how interested Bertha was as Sir Ecroyd made some critical remarks regarding Watteau and the limitations of his art—in what degree he was influenced by the artificial taste around him, and in what measure he influenced the taste of the period of such art. Sir Ecroyd was well known to be an authority on Sèvres porcelain. He was an authority on a considerable number of matters. Indeed, a certain scurrilous print—it was subsidized by the opposition—had declared that, so varied was his information, if he knew a little about statesmanship, there would be no topic upon which he would remain completely uninformed.

Bertha was greatly interested, Julian could see ; and he felt himself once more at the mercy of that demon which had exercised its power over him upon previous occasions—the demon that was accustomed to whisper into his ear those words :

“She is not yours—she is bound to you by no tie—she may walk out of this house with that man, and you have no authority to prevent her.”

He contrived to lead Lord Ashenthorpe up the room, still exclaiming against the prying habits of such papers as *Thistledown*. Sir Ecroyd was standing with his back turned to the lower part of the room and his face turned to Bertha, and the words that Julian heard him say were these :

“You will come, I am sure. It will be such a pleasure to me. Everyone knows my house in Piccadilly.”

“I shall be delighted, indeed,” was Bertha’s reply, and it seemed to Julian that it was spoken in a low tone.

“Ah, you have been examining the Sèvres,” said Lord Ashenthorpe. “I told Fairleigh about the jars, Charlton. He was most anxious to see your Sèvres. I told him that you had jars.”

“What family has not occasionally ?” said Charlton, with a smile. He flattered himself that no one could detect that *he was under the influence of that sneering demon.*

"Sir Ecroyd has been good enough to offer to show me his house of precious things, Julian," cried Bertha.

"That is very good of Sir Ecroyd," replied Julian pleasantly—so pleasantly that Sir Ecroyd knew in an instant what was in his heart. "And you have promised to make the pilgrimage to Piccadilly, I hope," added Julian.

"I have said that we shall be delighted," said Bertha.

"And so we shall, I am certain," said Julian.

"I trust so," said Sir Ecroyd. "I have made some mistakes, I dare say——"

"Oh, no, no," said Julian, still with transparent pleasantness.

"But I do not think I ever bought a poor bit of Sèvres," continued the minister, ignoring the interruption and the interrupter. "And yet I can assure you that those vases are worth the half of my collection. I envy you the possession of a treasure, Mr. Charlton. I trust you are fully acquainted with its variety and value."

Charlton looked at the speaker quickly, to try and discover if he meant his words to have a double meaning. But the face of the cabinet minister was as impenetrable as the face of the Sphinx. He had been looked at too often in exactly the same spirit of earnest inquiry by the occupants of the opposition benches not to be schooled how to meet such a look.

"I think," said Charlton, "that I know the real from the sham, even with the masks—how fond they were of their masks, those designers"—and he pointed to the fantastic heads with sprouting horns that wreathed themselves into handles for the vases. "Yes, I fancy I know when I have secured a treasure, Sir Ecroyd."

"You know my house, of course, Mr. Charlton," remarked Sir Ecroyd casually, without giving the least sign that he fancied a little fencing bout had been going on, in *which he had wielded one of the rapiers.*

"Who does not?" said Charlton. "People come from Boston to see it."

"Why Boston?" said Bertha.

"Because nothing else in the world worth seeing exists outside Boston," he replied.

Shortly afterward Lord Ashenthorpe and Sir Ecroyd left the Court; and the latter gave expression to his belief that Mr. Charlton was a good deal cleverer than anyone meeting him casually might be led to suppose.

"And his—the—lady?" inquired his host.

"Better than clever," said Sir Ecroyd; "sympathetic."

"Any woman who succeeds in making a man believe that she is good rather than clever," said Lord Ashenthorpe, lapsing into the French tongue, for a man was sitting with folded arms, but open ears, on the back seat, "is clever rather than good."

"And any man who thinks that he can epigram a woman's character away to the one who loves her is simple rather than clever," said Sir Ecroyd.

In the drawing room at the Court there was also a duologue.

"The clouds are passed," cried Bertha. "That sunshiny visit has sent all the clouds flying. What a difference there is between a man like Sir Ecroyd—or even like Lord Ashenthorpe—and those silly young fools who annoyed me just now! How silly I was to be annoyed!"

"If some people were not silly there would be no need for cabinet ministers," said Julian.

"That is the best excuse I have ever yet heard for silliness," laughed Bertha.

"I thought it rather an excuse for your cabinet minister," said Julian.

He felt that if the choice had been offered to him he would prefer to have seen her pleased at the visit of the silly youths, and annoyed at the visit of the cabinet minis-

ter. Silly youths are not a source of danger ; but cabinet ministers certainly are.

This he felt, not considering cabinet ministers in their official capacity, but from the standpoint of a man who fears that the woman whom he loves resembles the butterfly in disposition as well as in beauty.

And this was why Julian Charlton locked himself up in his library, eating his heart out, until the gong sounded for a more palatable repast at eight o'clock.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON BEING A PERSONAGE.

IN another week they were in London, and in another fortnight Julian's prediction had been realized: Bertha had become a Personage in society. Julian had managed to obtain a furnished house within a reasonable distance from the Marble Arch for two months, the owner receiving an honorarium at the rate of one hundred guineas a month, stables extra.

The first gallop they had together in the park made to Julian the gratifying revelation that even two years' absence is not sufficient to obliterate one from the recollection of all one's friends. He found himself presenting men and women to Bertha in batches the first time they pulled up under the trees. He had had a wide acquaintance in London before traveling, and he had only to reappear in a recognized haunt to be recognized by many. It is not until a man has been a third season away from London that he is utterly forgotten.

These statistics prove that London is not that heartless place which some philosophers assure us it is.

The young women to whom his name had been mentioned by their mothers in previous years as a young man of great possibilities, but to whom he had not proposed marriage, were now young wives—some of them—and having done very much better for themselves—some of them—were delighted to meet him, and to smile upon his wife, who they believed—some of them—had done so much worse in *marrying him* than they had done in marrying their hus-

bands. What was Mrs. Charlton's day, they were anxious to know—where was she living?

When the young women—some of them—were so gracious, it did not seem absurd that the young men—and the old ones—should be doubly so. They were; and Bertha told them what her day was and where she lived, and they expressed themselves delighted at the prospect of visiting Mrs. Charlton.

Thus it came about that, on Mrs. Charlton's "day," she received as many visitors in the course of a few hours as she had done during the whole of her life in Australia. The next day there was a snowstorm, with invitation cards for flakes, on her table.

She had become a Personage in London society.

Of all forms of slavery in the world that of a Personage in London society is the least disagreeable. The bitter draught was, she admitted, most successfully disguised. Every day brought her something new and interesting. She did not consider the possibility that she herself was regarded as the newest and, consequently, the most interesting of the features of the season. She felt that the people who showered invitations upon her did so out of kindness to her. She did not consider if it might not be that the people were anxious only to increase the success of their own entertainments by securing her for them.

Julian Charlton had lived in London society for some years. He had been a Personage in the best scientific "set." He had made some discoveries of an interesting but unnegotiable nature. He had been assured by a practical worker that if he turned all his attention in the direction of threading needles by electricity, a fortune would be the inevitable result. Another hinted at the manufacture of aerated tea and coffee, another at the utilization of seaweed for the making of apple jelly, and yet another at the invention of an odorless disinfectant for the pocket.

There was money in each of these things, he was assured.

He had ventured into none of these fields of enterprise. He had simply devoted himself, with considerable success, to the discovery of a practicable unit for the measurement of the centrifugal force put into action in the spinning of a humming top. He had thus obtained a name among the scientific workers of the day, and had been for some seasons new and interesting to society. He was not deceived by the arctic appearance of Bertha's table every morning. Those hummocks of snowy cards did not deceive him into fancying that they were sent with the sole device of giving pleasure to Bertha. He knew that they had been sent in order to increase the success of the entertainments to which they referred.

He often wondered if it was known in any direction in town that Bertha and he had never gone through the ceremony of marriage together. He had seen Marian Travers and Cyril Southcote more than once at large "At Homes"—so called probably because the hostess was less at home than anyone else—and he wondered if either Marian or Cyril had taken the trouble to narrate the scene which had occurred in the drawing room at the Court, when Lady Rushton had made her call. Julian was indifferent on the matter. He knew that, if it were to become universally known that he and Bertha had not gone through any ceremony of marriage together, the invitation cards would continue to arrive as plentifully as ever. The people in London society have no time to think of such things as morals. They want something new and interesting, and they do not care whether or not it comes to them in a questionable shape, so long as it comes. The divorce court has provided London society with many of its new and interesting heroines.

Julian noticed that Bertha did not now show any desire

to spread abroad the principles upon which her life with him was founded. She did not seek for an opportunity to prove to the people whom she met that the ceremony of marriage was an insult to that mystic love which alone should form the foundation for marriage.

Bertha found that what were her principles were the theories of quite a number of persons with whom she came in contact, and who were also regarded as interesting to society. They called themselves Free Lovers, and they were all very respectable people. She noticed that all the women who had made a name for themselves by promulgating these theories of love and spiritual marriage and affinity—this word was largely made use of by these ladies—were themselves snugly married according to the law of the land—all except one. She was unmarried. She was also angular, elderly, and spectacled. She divided her time equally in discussing the questions appertaining to woman's sufferings and woman's suffrage. The sufferings related to marriage, the suffrage to something else. No one had offered to take her at her word in regard to her theories of free love. She remained free as the air, and quite as unwholesome as that of London.

Not one of this band of theorizers had made her theories the principles of her life. Bertha perceived this very clearly, and she felt that they were little better than *figurantes*. They were posing for the sake of effect as original thinkers. She alone had had the courage to act in accordance with her convictions.

She listened passively while these sham Free Lovers discoursed on the subject of their theories. Some declared that the emancipation of woman was at the point of being achieved through the universal acceptance of the spiritual marriage ; others talked of the glorious future that awaited those women who had never met with their affinity on earth, but who were perfectly certain that they would meet

him in heaven. What would happen then no one seemed exactly to know ; but there was a vague belief that the moralities would be carefully respected. Then there was the sublime question of the man and woman who had been mistaken in their affinities on earth, but who were carefully awaited by their affinities in another world. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that the waiting affinities would not mind the others having lived together for half a century or so on earth, which showed that the affinities were not particular, but of an extremely obliging nature.

There were also the ladies in the sect who declared that they had had repeated conversations with their affinities who were in another world. It was only by the anticipation of such sublime moments that they dragged on their existence by the side of their fleshly husbands, they said. If one might judge from the nature of the reported conversation of the affinities they were a commonplace lot. The fleshly husbands could give them points, a youth remarked to Bertha in an undertone, after listening to the discourse of one of these ladies.

Others had had visits from their affinities—usually by night ; for it seems that the affinities are fondest of the night for paying hurried calls. Their appearance to the ladies who were describing these mysteries in subdued tones, but with infinite expression, brought before Bertha's eyes a vision of a badly burning night-light.

The precise result of these mystic visits was wrapped in obscurity, but it was inferred that the affinities had gone away without a stain on their character. Indeed, so far as could be gathered, the affinities were incapable of anything that was not strictly moral—a fact which was considered in some directions rather hard on the affinities, and, perhaps, on those whom they visited.

Bertha turned away from all this jargon—from all this concealment of a divine truth beneath the tawdry garments

of the footlights. These Free Lovers, as they called themselves, were, she perceived, only a more vulgar development of the essentially vulgar spiritualists. The spiritualists, she knew, were people who were devoid in all their thoughts of everything that was spiritual. So these Free Lovers were devoid of any true idea of love.

Great Heavens! how the world has fallen away from the poetry of paganism!

This was the girl's feeling as she heard these sorry *figurantes* raising their hands and their eyebrows as they talked, in the low tones one instinctively adopts in telling a child a ghost story, about their affinities, conjuring up pictures that were meant to be sublime, but that smelt of the nursery. The pagan poets could do better than that. Their spirits were spiritual. They did not suggest a night-light that had been kept in a damp cupboard.

Bertha turned with relief to the theology which entered into the daily life of paganism. "'Suckled in a creed outworn,'" she cried. "'A creed outworn,' while the creeds that remain find such exponents as those creatures, with their jargon of affinities and spiritism, and theosophy, caring as little as their audiences what the words mean!"

She knew they were not in earnest. They believed only in snug homes, following the marriage ceremony in a church. They were not in earnest, and the people who listened to them were not in earnest.

"What does it matter?" cried Julian. "People here haven't time to be in earnest. They don't want to be in earnest. They want to be entertained, and these Free Lovers are supposed to be entertaining."

"They are little better than impostors," said Bertha.

"Impostors? Why, they do not deceive even themselves," said he.

"They cause people to treat with levity and ridicule a matter which is the most sacred that anyone can

approach," said Bertha. "Never mind," she added ; "we are right—so much is certain."

There was a considerable pause before he said :

"Yes, I suppose there can be no doubt about that."

She turned to him quickly.

"There is something in your voice that suggests doubt," said she. "I have felt now and again—I don't know why—that our thoughts do not flow together as they used to do. Can it be possible that there is in your heart a measure of doubt as to the truth of the principles which we made the rule of our life together?"

"Why do you ask me that?" said he. "Have you had any reason, since we came together, to reproach me with having failed to stand by your principles? When Lady Rushton turned upon you, did I not turn her out of my house? Where have I failed in my duty to you?"

"Why, you talk as if the principles upon which we live were mine alone, Julian," she cried. "What does your reference to standing by me mean, if not that? What merit is there to be claimed for your standing by the principles which you yourself have accepted, and in which you assured me you believed with all your heart?"

"None whatever," he answered. "I do not claim any merit for anything I have done. I only claim to be exempted from any reproach."

"Forgive me if you think I have spoken too strongly to you, my dearest," said she. "But you know what reason I have to feel strongly on this matter. If I thought that you had any misgiving as to the truth and the value of the principles which have guided me—us—both you and me—in joining our lives together, I would consider that my life was wrecked."

"You have no reason to doubt me," said he.

"And I am sure that I never shall," she cried quickly. "I feel that what Sir Ecroyd said on this matter is quite true."

"What who said?" asked Julian after a pause.

"What Sir Ecroyd said. I told him all that we believe on the subject of marriage and its sanctity without the need for shackles."

"My God! you told Sir Ecroyd that?"

"Yes, and he was greatly interested in it all. Only, as I told you just now, he said that the strength of such a compact as ours is largely dependent upon the man. I say that I feel the truth of this every day."

"You have been confiding in Sir Ecroyd, indeed," remarked Julian, with a voice and face devoid of expression, but with a heart burning with the fierceness of a seven times heated furnace.

"I cannot say that I had any intention of doing so when I left home for the Berwicks yesterday; but somehow I found myself telling him all that I hoped for in this matter. I had gone with him to look at a certain orchid in the greenhouse, and I suppose he led the conversation into that particular channel. He is very clever."

"Yes, I think so much must be admitted," said Julian. "He led you first into a track that brought you into the orchid-house, and when there he led you into a conversational track that brought you up to the point at which you confided in him. Yes, I think you have come to the right conclusion in this matter. Sir Ecroyd is a clever man."

"You are speaking in a curious tone, Julian," said she. "I like Sir Ecroyd better than any man I have yet met in England. I told you so long ago. Why should I have hesitated to tell him what I am not ashamed of—that you and I——"

"Oh, why should you—why should you hesitate for a moment?" he cried, with bitterness in every word. "Why should you not confide all that is in your heart to this model cabinet minister—this sympathetic Controller of *Annexations*! A clever man—a very clever man! I

wonder if all the young wives in London pour into his willing ear a full and true account of the rules that guide their lives? I wonder does he give them all the same advice—namely, to look carefully after their husbands.”

“I don’t know whether you are talking in jest or in earnest,” she said quietly. “But I know that only once before did I hear you talk in the same tone. I do not like the tone; it is not the tone of a true husband to a true wife.”

“Perhaps it is not,” said he. “But now and again, you know, people find themselves under such conditions as force them to ask, ‘What is truth?’”

He left the room quickly. The fact was that he feared she might do so first, as she had done some weeks before, when the little cloud had floated across their life.

When Bertha found herself alone she was conscious only of having received a blow from an unseen hand, as it were. She had a pained sensation, but at first she felt only benumbed.

Her spirit apprehends the sense of pain,
But not its cause.

So Shelley described such a sensation as that which Bertha experienced.

What had she done—what had she said, to give rise to such an expression of bitter feeling on the part of Julian?

She could not remember having said or done anything. His words were mysterious.

What spirit had taken possession of him to cause him to talk to her in this way? She recollected what he had said to her on that day at the Court, when they had returned from Ashmead. The words which he had just spoken to her were not the same, but the tone in which they were uttered was exactly the same. What did he mean by employing such a tone to her?

She had heard of men—especially husbands—being

easily "put out." The most trivial matter occasionally affected them in this way, she had heard from some wise women—especially wives—whom she had known in Australia. The dampness of the first match in a box of matches had been known to lay the foundation for a quarrel between a husband and wife that ended only in a family council and a deed of separation. The bursting of a buttonhole had in another case let loose a flood of vituperation in the choicest San Franciscan tongue ; while the anger aroused in a third case by the over-frizzling of a slice of bacon was only partially appeased by the destruction of every article of china in the room, and of a mirror as well.

She did not believe that Julian was a man who was given to the expression of feeling through the medium of a casual projectile. But surely it would be better for him to break all the mirrors in the house than to speak to her in a tone that implied that she had been guilty of something passing those ordinary irritations of wives, which lead to the destruction of porcelain and the wrecking of furniture.

The worst of all was that she could not guess what was the cause of his bitterness. The wife who had told her about the burst buttonhole had at least the satisfaction of looking at the rent linen, and the one who had mentioned the bacon incident could contemplate the overcooked slice, and know that it had brought about the necessity for a visit to the china shop ; but she had nothing tangible in this way to lay hold of to account for Julian's display of feeling.

She felt bewildered at first, then pained, then bewildered again, and then she rang for her maid—the substitute she had obtained in room of the faithless Miriam—to dress her to go forth to where a certain Mrs. Abed Nego—the wife of the distinguished financier—was "at home" with "dancing" in the corner, if the invitation card might be *taken to suggest anything.*

CHAPTER XLII.

ON THE SMILE OF MISS TRAVERS.

"DANCING" was in the corner of Mme. Abed Nego's card, but this graceful exercise was not confined to one corner of her spacious mansion. Everybody knows the Abed Negos—especially every person who has done business with Mr. Abed Nego. It is said that they are of Hebrew origin, and perhaps they are. There are, however, many persons who assert that their earliest progenitor was a Persian. Perhaps he was. People in London society have, however, long ago abandoned asking the question "Who *were* they?" in favor of the question "Who *are* they?" and it was generally admitted that, if the Abed Negos had once been Jewish-Persians, they were now the most successful of dance givers, dinner givers, and garden party givers in London.

Why the wife of Mr. Abed Nego was called madame, no one knew; but yet everyone alluded to her as madame, though she had not a millinery shop in Bond Street or Regent Street. The purchase of a millinery business in either of these localities carries with it the title of madame, just as some estates in Italy are sold with the title of marchese or barone, as the case may be. No one, however, thought of alluding to Mr. Abed Nego as monsieur.

Mr. Abed Nego was a successful financier, and dealt largely in transactions having an intimate association with Greece, Turkey, and the Levant. He had obtained immense concessions in many lands in exchange for cash. The Levant and the Levanters—the name is an unhappy one, but it is not deficient in descriptiveness—are usually

in need of cash, and as Mr. Abed Nego had usually the control of large sums, it was generally assumed that he could purchase the souls of the entire Levant population, even allowing one soul to every man, woman, and child, which is certainly a more liberal allowance than the experience of such persons as are thoroughly conversant with that quarter of the world would be disposed to concede to the population.

Mr. Abed Nego did very much better. The Levantine soul, though admittedly an article of commerce, does not rank high as a negotiable security. A tramway concession, when it relates to a populous district, does ; and Mr. Abed Nego had obtained not merely tramway concessions, but telegraph, telephone, and electric lighting concessions, all of which offered magnificent possibilities in the way of floating companies in England. By the judicious disposal of his claims it was reported that Mr. Abed Nego had cleared a trifle over two millions of pounds—not Egyptian, but English. He had, at the same time, become a person to be considered in any scheme that might be devised for solving the Eastern question. It was said that even Russia had offered to buy him, but without success, Mr. Abed Nego feeling that his hands would be more free if he remained unbought—a conclusion that did credit to his sagacity.

He was in parliament, where again he displayed his sagacity by remaining silent session after session. He had, however, helped the government in some of their Eastern difficulties—for a consideration, this being that royalty was to be present at one of Mme. Abed Nego's parties.

Royalty had been, as usual, obedient. Some thousands of (nominal) Christians in Asia Minor had been emancipated from the thralldom of Mussulman rule, and Mme. Abed Nego had become a personage in society. It was understood that both Mr. and Mme. Abed Nego were *greatly* interested in the progress of Christianity in the

Levant, and if a larger proportion of gentlemen of a Levantine cast of countenance, and of ladies of Levantine figures, than one expected to find in a London drawing room might be found at some of Mme. Abed Nego's parties, this fact was generally accepted as proving the lady's anxiety to bring the various races that come from the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean under the benign influences of Christianity.

While Bertha and Julian were being driven to Saxe-Coburg House, the mansion of the Abed Negos, they did not exchange many words, and such as they did exchange were in regard to the most commonplace topics. The approach of the first cloud had been clearly defined. It had come in a heavy mass, if its area had not been very great. It had thrown a well-defined shadow over them; but this new obscuration of their domestic sunshine was lighter and partook more of the character of a clinging mist around them. It did not cast a dark shadow upon them, but they had breathed of its dimness. It had entered into their life. Bertha felt feverish. Julian felt as if he were by the side of a stranger as they walked along the scarlet drugget which was laid down on the short drive within the grounds of Saxe-Coburg House, and crushed their way up the fine staircase, to be greeted by their heated host and scented hostess, and then to pass on to one of the great drawing rooms, where an entertainer was producing sweet music by touching the edges of a number of tumblers partly filled with water. Later in the night a lady gave a whistling entertainment in the same apartment, while in a more distant room, a sallow-faced gentleman gave imitations of popular actors, taking the wise precaution of announcing beforehand the particular actor he meant to imitate. In the grounds of Saxe-Coburg House a certain Green Scandinavian Band performed at intervals.

The electric light was worshiped by Mr. Abed Nego—

Arumazda -> Mazda lamp!

another instance of the irresistible influence of heredity people said—this was, of course, assuming that his ancestors had been Persians. However this may be, he was certainly fond of being in the midst of this illuminant. His gardens were in a blaze of it. In the great square vestibule it glittered among blocks of ice and huge palms, and in the supper rooms it twinkled among the festoons of roses brought by a special train from the Riviera. Mme. Abed Nego may originally have been a Persian, but she was now judicious, and insisted on having the indoor lights tinged with yellow, consequently her guests were not afraid to enter the most brightly illuminated of her drawing rooms, though complexions are becoming more evanescent every day.

It was, however, in the greenhouses, which were reached through a corridor from one of the supper rooms, that the electric lights were allowed a chance of making the strongest contrast of brilliancy and shadow. The greenhouses were a marvel of beauty. Many were about the extent of a whole block of buildings, and contained fountains, and ponds, with water lilies floating on their surface, and overhung by great palms planted among rock work.

Almost the first person on whom Bertha's eyes rested on entering the room where the tumbler music was being produced was Charlie Barham, the midshipman, looking as handsome and as bright as ever, as he chatted away to a statuesque girl, who now and again went so far as to smile at some of the terms with which he besprinkled his narrative.

On seeing Bertha enter by the side of Charlton poor Charlie's story was suddenly arrested, just when it was approaching a point of enormity that even a stranger could scarcely allow to pass unchallenged. His face became overcast for a moment, but then assumed an exaggerated look of resignation, as he hastened to meet Bertha and to *clasp* the hand which she stretched out to him.

"At last," he murmured, "at last!"

"Yes, at last, indeed," said Bertha. "How is it that we have never met, although my husband and I have been everywhere during the past month?"

"Your hus—hus—oh, I cannot say the word," said Charlie. "Your—oh, do not ask me to say it."

"Do not be a goose," said Bertha. "There is no compulsion to say the hated word. Let it be understood."

"And I have looked down the first column of at least one newspaper every day, expecting and hoping that the blow might be spared to me. How did I miss seeing *Charlton v. Lancaster*? No, they don't put the *v.* in the marriages, only in the law cases. Never mind; it was not to be, so far as I was concerned. And yet, if you had only waited for eight years—perhaps for seven, with good luck—Oh, don't fear for me, I won't make a scene. Charlton, old boy, be worthy of her; and if you don't mind spending a trifle of money in a good cause, bring her every spring to lay some wild flowers on my grave. Take any ice you please with the exception of the pineapple; the pineapple will make you wish that you were attending a sacred concert, where you are expected to look solemn. Mme. Darius should be better advised in the matter of ices."

"Who is Mme. Darius?" asked Bertha.

"Why, you have just shaken hands with her," said Charlie. "Madame is descended from Darius and Nebuchadnezzar and King Pharaoh, don't you know?"

"Not from all, surely?"

"Why not? They all belong to the one lot, and they all slept with their fathers."

"I begin to fancy myself once more aboard the *Car-narvon Castle*, hearing the sound of your voice, Charlie."

Why Bertha should feel some difficulty in keeping the tears from her eyes as she spoke it would be hard to say. *Perhaps the sound of the boy's voice brought back to her*

a memory of the happiness of that voyage in the *Carnarvon Castle*, and perhaps she felt that those days were happier than any she had experienced since she had come to London.

"And I," said Charlie; "if *you* feel like that what must *my* feelings be? He will never love you as I have loved you. Look how he has gone off with—why, it's that Miss Travers; he is taking her to where the tea and sherbet are laid out."

Julian had drifted away, greeting several persons whom he had been in the habit of meeting night after night—companion ships in the whirlpool of society—and finding himself by the side of Marian Travers had offered to pilot her to the tea room. Bertha watched them glide away in the midst of a crowd, and it occurred to her that Julian's face had become much brighter since he had met Marian than it had been during any part of the day.

She also noticed the smile with which Marian Travers had greeted him, and the way she was even now looking up to his face.

All at once there came to her for the first time the curious thought:

"He is bound to me by no tie. If he chose to walk with her out of the door I could not compel him to return to me."

It came to her in a moment, and its sting reached her heart.

"Why, where is all your fun gone?" cried Charlie. "Alas, that marriage should produce such a change! Why, don't you remember how no day passed without something to keep us merry as sand boys?"

"I suppose we were very merry," said she. "It seems so long ago."

"Great Heavens! You say that quite sadly," cried Charlie. "That's the way you all get as soon as you

marry. No matter what larks we have had together, you all get so proper inside a month, as if a marriage and a funeral meant just the same thing. It's only for the first month or so that you are sad, however; I notice that all you young things become lively once more in a year or two. You then either take up with an extremely young or an extremely old man—mostly the latter—the old boys are such jolly old asses."

"How wise you are, Charlie, and how observant."

"Oh, I've kept my eyes open, I can tell you. The funniest sight in the world is an old boy that marries a bright young thing. He is under the impression that marrying her brings him down to exactly her age. Poor old chaps! I have often pitied them, knowing that it means a push on of twenty years with them instead of a drawback of forty. Oh, I have had my eyes open. Never mind! you are the best girl I have ever met, and worth a score of Marian Travers. I don't say that because she took a sovereign off me."

"How did she take a sovereign off you?"

"You see, she made up her mind at the Cape to hook Charlton, and we had a few bets as to whether or not she would succeed before reaching England. I backed her to do it, and Waring took me up. I handed him over the coin when we passed Dover. But I give you my word that if you had not come aboard the thing was a moral. It was indeed. Before we reached St. Helena I would have had to offer five to one on the girl."

"I hope you do not talk like this to everyone, Charlie. I don't consider it quite respectful to a girl to make her the subject of a bet. You did not bet on me, I hope."

"I would lay every penny I have on you; but I never did. You were always far above me—a saint, or something of that sort—only a saint with a lot of fun in her. And to think that I just came here to-night by chance. You see,

my governor is in the iron line, and he has got the c for five hundred miles of tramway rails through l Darius, and he wants to be civil to him ; but he said be hanged if he'd go to Mme. Darius' squeeze—mea this joyous entertainment, so I came in his place—f consideration. And here I meet you—and—now wh. it that young Darius is bringing up to you ? ”

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON SOME FORMS OF IMPUDENCE.

WHAT the eldest son of Mr. and Mme. Abed Nego was conducting to Bertha was a rather undersized gentleman, wearing as a stud in the center of his shirt the largest diamond Bertha had ever seen, and upon his feet the smallest shoes she had ever seen. He had an immense nose, that suggested the beak of a tropical nut-eating bird, and eyes that suggested two of the nuts—black ones—which such a bird would attack with deliberation.

"Mrs. Charlton," said young Mr. Abed Nego, "will you allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. Betstein? Mr. Betstein—Mrs. Charlton."

"It is a great bleasure to be to beet you, Bissus Charlton," said Mr. Betstein. "I have frequently beed dear you at these sort of affairs, but I dever had the bleasure of beig bresented to you before."

"I am sure I have seen you frequently, Mr. Betstein," said Bertha. "One meets so many persons——"

"Of course that is quite true," said Mr. Betstein. "Ad I dow that I'b a cobbodplace sort of fellow—like wod of the crowd, you dow." Here Mr. Betstein gave a little snuffle, and smiled at his gloves, which fitted admirably. "Do't you thik you have had edough of that chap with the tubblers, Bissus Charlton?" he continued. "That sort of thig isn't by idea of the use tubblers should be put to."

Bertha said she thought the tumbler music very interesting indeed. She remained in the hope that some kindly friend of hers would arrive to rescue her from the intolerable *brilliancy* of Mr. Betstein's diamond stud and raven

locks. It so happened, however, that no one who entered the room seemed to perceive her, and she was forced to listen to the variations on "Ah, che la morte," produced by the professor of the musical glasses, and to the vocal accompaniment of Mr. Betstein's conversation, punctuated with snuffles.

In sheer despair, after ten minutes waiting for a rescuer, she rose and allowed herself to be conducted by Mr. Betstein to the room where, he told her, the entertainer was giving his celebrated imitations of popular actors. She felt certain that on the way to the place of entertainment she would meet with Cyril Southcote—for was not Marian there?—or Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh—for was the government not anxious to conciliate Mr. Abed Nego? If either of these champions failed to rescue her from Mr. Betstein, she would trust to some of her casual acquaintances to help her. She could not remember having been so long a time at any entertainment without meeting at least a score of friends. But she had never before been at an entertainment in Saxe-Coburg House.

The corridor was greatly crowded—so much so that an advance could only be effected with great inconvenience both to the advancers and those who were advanced upon. Mr. Betstein was not gifted with the instincts of progress—it is to the West, not to the East, that one looks nowadays for the display of such gifts, and Mr. Betstein was clearly of Eastern origin. He tried to force his way through the groups, but without success. He was scowled upon by the persons whom he had indiscriminately elbowed aside, and Bertha felt that she was attracting some attention as the companion of the elboweer.

"Oh, bother it all!" exclaimed Mr. Betstein, when less than halfway down the corridor. "I dever cabe id codtact with such a rude set. Let us stroll id here, Bissus Charltoed, till we get a chadce of moving od. It is what Abed Dego

calls his Oriental roob, but it's do bore Oriental than I ab."

"Anywhere out of this," said Bertha, going through the gorgeous hangings of the doorway, surmounted by a Cairo carving.

In less than a quarter of an hour a pale-faced, melancholy man, with a roll of music in his hand, like a field marshal's baton, appeared at the end of the corridor. He was recognized in a moment. A whisper went down the groups that Monomime had arrived. The lugubrious person with the music was known as the funniest entertainer in London. And his latest sketch, entitled "Mrs. Butterfly's Ball," had taken the town by storm.

When Mr. Monomime had gone to the music room, the corridor was almost deserted.

Charlie Barham had just heard that unless he hurried into the music room he would only just hear Mr. Monomime's marvelous imitation of the calling of the carriages outside Mrs. Butterfly's mansion. So he forsook the ice—not pineapple—which he was eating in a secluded nook downstairs (it was his fifth) and hastened along the corridor. Just as he was passing the entrance to the Oriental room, the heavy hangings of the Cairo doorway billowed forward and from their folds a figure burst and stood outside with clenched hands and white face, looking around in a dazed way.

"Great Admiral! What has happened, Mrs. Charlton?" cried Charlie. "For God's sake, don't look in that way. Surely you're not one of the fainting lot."

"Charlie," said Bertha in a voice of hysterical sobs, "take me to—to my husband. I must get away from this horrible place—it is stifling me."

"Sorry you are feeling a bit faint," cried Charlie for the benefit of the people who still remained in the corridor, and who seemed anxious to learn what had occurred to cause

Mrs. Charlton to fling herself in that fashion through the *portière* of the Cairo doorway. "A breath of fresh air will do you all the good in the world," he added, putting her hand under his arm. Then in a whisper he said, "Don't give way before these people. Be a brave girl; remember there's nothing to fear; I am by your side; I am ready to die for you. Come along."

She managed with his assistance to walk to the end of the corridor. She did not speak; she was trembling terribly, Charlie could perceive; and now and again a sob that suggested the approach of hysterics came from her throat.

"Now won't you pull yourself together?" said Charlie imploringly. "Don't give these fools around us the chance of talking. You will never be the same to me if you go off in a faint. I'll get you a chair and an ice—not pineapple—the vanilla is all right."

He saw where there was a vacant seat—a shell made of plush—and he had wheeled it to her in a moment. She seated herself, and when he suggested the recuperative possibilities of Neapolitan ices, she laid her hand on his arm, but did not speak. It was some minutes before she was able to say in a weak voice:

"Thank you, Charlie; you are my best friend. If you would only find Julian and tell him that I wish to be taken home."

"Dare I leave you?" asked Charlie with the air of an amateur lady nurse. "You have made up your mind not to faint?"

"You may trust me," she said. "I promise you not to faint."

"On those conditions I will go," said he.

He hurried off to the music room and was fortunate enough to be just in time to hear Mr. Monomime's account of the dialogue on the stairs of Mrs. Butterfly's mansion

between some young couples who were reposeing there after the exertions of the dance.

He looked around, but could perceive Julian Charlton nowhere. Then he took a stroll through the conservatories, but without success. Finally he reached the corridor, having made a fruitless round of the premises.

Before he reached Bertha again he became aware that a man was bending over her. At first he thought that the man was Charlton, but in an instant he saw that he was a stranger.

"I have taken a cruise to every point of the compass, Mrs. Charlton, but without getting a sight of your husband."

"I am so sorry that you were put to so much trouble, Charlie," said she. "But Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh has been good enough to offer me his brougham to go home by—ours will not be here for at least an hour and a half."

"Maybe you are well enough to remain now," said Charlie.

"Oh, I am well enough," she said quickly; "but I must go—I must leave this place."

Sir Ecroyd, who had been bending over her when Charlie came up, offered her his arm; she took it and rose to her feet, giving Charlie her other hand with a smile—not the smile that he associated with her aboard the *Carnarvon Castle*, however. She went off by the side of the minister, whose immobile countenance failed to tell Charlie whether or not Bertha had confided the secret of her trouble to him.

"It is like their impudence," said Charlie. "That big fellow, because he happens to be something or other in the government, coolly appropriates her while I am searching for the husband, and then walks off with her to his brougham. He will see her home, and maybe sit with her for an hour or two, assuring her that he dare not leave her alone—I know the tricks of these boys, whether they

are First Lords of the Admiralty or something greatly inferior."

In the midshipman's eyes, every post in the government was a long way inferior in rank to that of the First Lord of the Admiralty.

He was mistaken respecting the movements of the Minister of Annexation. Sir Ecroyd had plainly not accompanied Bertha to her home. He returned to where Charlie was standing, and his face was as impassive as ever. The lad did not change his position as the minister came up. He was not the First Lord—he was not even that poor thing, a civil lord.

"Have you any idea of the cause of Mrs. Charlton's indisposition?" asked Sir Ecroyd. "She told me that you were an old friend of hers—one of her best friends."

Charlie had been prepared to treat Sir Ecroyd with chilling formality. The knowledge of boys and their ways and moods had, however, been acquired by Sir Ecroyd early in life, and he was well aware of what was passing through the mind of the excellent specimen before him. If he could not manage to make a boy tractable how could he hope to trick the opposition? He knew that Charlie's face would brighten when he spoke his words, just as the man who presses the button of an electric bell knows that a horrid alarm will be produced at the other end of the wire.

Charlie's face brightened.

"I am her friend, sir," he replied.

"She said so—her best friend."

"I hope I may deserve to be called so, Sir Ecroyd."

"I do not doubt that you will. Have you any idea of what happened to put her about?"

"I can't say that I know for certain. But I can give *some sort of a guess*. Some fellows are damn scoundrels, *Sir Ecroyd*."

"They are—damn scoundrels. Have you seen Mr. Charlton here?"

"I have just been looking for him. He is out of sight somewhere. I wasn't thinking of him."

"Of whom, then?"

"Pardon me, Sir Ecroyd," said Charlie. "That is my business."

"It is—it is indeed," said the minister. "You think that that person said something that was hurtful to Mrs. Charlton?"

"He looked equal to it," said Charlie. "A damn skunk of a chap with oily hair and a diamond stud about the size of a masthead light. What would a chap stick at that has a snuffle like a boiler waste-pipe when the winch is working?"

"Nothing," replied the minister. "Don't make a scene, whatever you do. Think what it would be to have Mrs. Charlton's name associated with a scene."

"I flatter myself on not having quite reached the driveling stage of idiocy," said Charlie. "You may depend on my doing nothing that will compromise a lady whom I respect with all the devotion of——"

"The word of a British officer," said Sir Ecroyd, "is enough for me. What is your ship?"

"The *Bluebottle*, sir."

"The *Bluebottle*. You may depend on my remembering it. Lord Gerald dines with me on Saturday."

Up went Charlie's right forefinger to an imaginary cap peak.

Sir Ecroyd was only a cabinet minister, but Charlie could not have treated him with greater respect if he had been the navigating lieutenant of a corvette.

Lord Gerald was First Lord of the Admiralty.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON THE DISADVANTAGES OF ELECTRIC LIGHT.

CHARLIE BARHAM could not be said to contribute materially to the success of Mme. Abed Nego's "At Home." Dancing had commenced in the ballroom, but he would not dance. He was devoting a night to the discovery of Mr. Betstein. He had, of course, no positive assurance that Mr. Betstein was the origin of Bertha's sudden appearance at the doorway of the Oriental room, but he had his own suspicions on the subject; and he knew that Mr. Betstein's peculiarities of articulation would be accepted by all reasonable people as strong presumptive evidence that he was quite equal to insulting a lady.

He went through the Cairo doorway at once, and strolled casually among the divans, most of which were now occupied. Mr. Betstein was not to be seen among any of the groups in this interesting apartment, nor was he in either the ballroom, the supper room, or where the claret cup and ices were to be had. There were many apartments in Mr. Abed Nego's mansion, but Charlie did not think that he could honorably pursue his search after Mr. Betstein to the kitchens or the bedrooms, though he was quite satisfied that Mr. Betstein would not shrink from the attempt to conceal himself in either the upper or the lower apartments.

He spent more than an hour in the search through the rooms before he went out to the electric lit grounds, where the Green Scandinavian Band was making the air melodious. After all, he felt that it would be much more satisfactory *for him* to come across Mr. Betstein in the open air. One

has always a freer hand in punching a man's head in the open air. In the midst of a breezy landscape one does a thing of this sort very much better than when subjected to the restrictions incidental to such a transaction within doors; and Charlie Barham meant to punch the head of Mr. Betstein before he slept.

He knew he could do it without causing an undue strain upon his powers.

It is satisfactory for anyone to feel equal to the duty of punishing a man who has behaved like a scoundrel. On the other hand, it is very irritating when your scoundrel stands anything over six feet, especially if he is made in proportion. When he is made in proportion you will be acting wisely—unless you stand six feet three yourself—if you leave him to the gnawing of his own conscience.

Charlie knew that Mr. Betstein was heavily handicapped in any personal conflict by his nose. Such an organ invited the aggressive fist. It did not need that one should be more than a casual critic to perceive that Mr. Betstein's face presented fine opportunities to an assailant, and Charlie was more than a casual critic. He was something of a connoisseur in such matters; and he honestly believed that the shape and superficial area of Mr. Betstein's nose invited interference.

These open air reflections naturally increased the eagerness of the lad to discover the whereabouts of the person to whom they referred. Only once did the thought occur to him that it was quite possible that Mrs. Charlton's nervousness might not be due to Mr. Betstein. He crushed down this unworthy suggestion, and hurried on to the only quarter that he had left unexplored—namely, the green-houses.

The large palm house with the dome contained many persons sitting, mostly in couples, on the low and luxurious chairs in the recesses among the palms. Among these

couples he strolled, but no shirt stud gave back the blaze of the electric light, as he knew Mr. Betstein's would have done.

There was another greenhouse beyond this one; it was long, and it was arranged with banks and rockeries for such plants as required moisture. It was here that the ornamental ponds with fountains and water lilies were situated. The electric light was laid along the ferns and mosses, and produced a charmingly subdued effect. Personally, Mr. Abed Nego was by no means fond of subdued effects; but he was willing to humor those who were.

The instant that Charlie opened the door leading to this retreat he perceived the blaze of a diamond shirt stud in the distance, and the peculiar articulation of Mr. Betstein came upon his ears. He had found the person for whom he had been searching.

Mr. Betstein was standing with two other men, who had also peculiarities of utterance, one speaking with a lisp, and the other with that German accent which has its origin in Hamburg. All were smoking cigarettes and exchanging remarks on some subject that seemed to be of general interest.

Charlie walked round the longest of the ponds until he got in the shadow of the bank beside which the group was standing.

"My boy," one of the three was saying, "you have no discretion. You treat all ladies alike. That's how you find yourself in scrapes."

"You're wrog there, Bordecai, old bad," came the voice of Mr. Betstein. "I treat all ladies of wud class alike, ad all of adother class alike; I ab do fool."

"That's true enough," remarked the other. "But for a man that's no fool you find yourself in a good many close things."

He pronounced the words "yourthelf" and "cloth."

"Every chap with a bit of spirit bust occasiodally," said Mr. Betstein. "But how was I to guess that the youg wobad would cut up rough?"

"Somebodys have been blaying a yoke down in you, Betstein, mein fren," said the Hamburg gentleman. "Thot young ting has been all square married all ze times."

"I tell you what is well knowd," said Mr. Betstein. "She is do bore barried to hib thad I ab to her. I give you by word of hodder as a gettlebad that I broke the thig to her as a gettlebad should. I said, 'I'b id love with you at first sight, by dear, ad as I'b a bisidess bad, I probise to cub dowd hadsobе. So dabe your figure; I'b a bad of hodder,' I added, 'ad dever let boney stad in the way of love.' Those were by words."

"Yes, they were fair and straightforward," said one of the audience. "She would have nothing to complain of, unless you were mistaken at the outset. If she isn't married all square, how could she come here? There you are."

"How? Well, you are ad outsider dot to dow that thigs dowadays are very different frob what they were whed we were youg, Bordecai. Why, the people they allow idto respectable society id these days would have bade our fathers ad bothers blush. If a bad or wobad is coddected with ady fad—eved baking light of so sacred a thig as barriage, they will be adbitted idto the best society."

"Dos is ver differently to us in Hamburg," said the German. "In Hamburg ve have yet ze ver best society zat may be had in all through Europe. No more cigarette for me. I go to make my vay out. Come 'long."

"Dot be—dot be," said Betstein. "I have do barticular wish to fide byself in frot of ad iddigdat husbad. I bead to stay here till the dager is past. I'll be the last to leave the ship."

After a few jocularities, Mr. Betstein's friends went off, and Mr. Betstein was left alone—as he thought.

He lit another cigarette and began to hum an operatic air. He was a great patron of the lyric stage.

"Mr. Betstein," said Charlie, stalking round and facing the diamond stud, "I want to have a few words with you, if you please."

"Eh," said Mr. Betstein, looking at him from head to foot. "Who bay you be, bister?"

"It doesn't matter who I am," said Charlie. "I want to know what it was you said to the lady who was foolish enough to go with you into that room off the corridor."

"Go to the devil," remarked Mr. Betstein with some fierceness.

"I'll do the nearest thing to it, for I'll go for you, you infernal Jew," said Charlie. "Now look out for yourself."

Mr. Betstein may have looked out for himself, but he certainly failed to look out for Charlie. The boy had done a good deal of fighting since he had commenced at six years of age. A good deal of promiscuous fighting can be done at intervals between the ages of six and seventeen, and Charlie Barham had lost no legitimate opportunity of practicing.

He spared Mr. Betstein's nose until Mr. Betstein had kicked him twice on the leg, and this so irritated him, that he gave up all idea of resisting the temptation the nose offered him. That organ fared badly during the next few seconds, and also Mr. Betstein's teeth, which were very white, and his eyes, which were very black. Then he caught Mr. Betstein by the back of his collar, and forced him with singular ease, when once he got him under way, down the greenhouse, until he was opposite the pond with the gold fish and the water lilies. Indeed he only loosed his hold when Mr. Betstein's toes were suddenly arrested by the rock work on the margin of the pond. Now, as the *impetus* given to the upper portion of Mr. Betstein's body *was not simultaneously* arrested, it would be ridiculous to

suppose that the laws of nature should be suspended in his favor ; so, while his toes remained among the rock work, his body was among the water lilies of the ornamental water.

The yell that came from Mr. Betstein the moment he perceived, with great sagacity, what must be the goal of his sudden race, brought several of Mme. Abed Nego's guests from the palm house into the fern house. The electric light was quite powerful enough to show them the dripping figure of Mr. Betstein rising from the water lilies like a burlesque of Aphrodite, and taking good care to scramble up at the side farthest from where Charlie was standing.

"Great Heavens! what have you been about?" cried Charlton, who watched the efforts of Mr. Betstein to obtain a footing among the stones where the maidenhair ferns were growing.

"Bolice—get the bolice—ad attebted bûrder—dothing short of burder!" sobbed Mr. Betstein, and then ejected a piece of water lily (*Nymphæa alba*, Linn.) from his mouth.

"He slipped in, Charlton," said Charlie. "I was present ; I saw it all from the very first. Look here, you chap," he called out across the water that was still swaying. "Look here—this is Mr. Charlton who wishes to know how it came about. I have told him that you slipped in. You tell him so too when you have a spare moment. Now what do you say?"

"It was ad accidet," gurgled Mr. Betstein after a pause, when he had got rid of a fern frond (*Scolopendrium vulgare*) that interfered with his articulation.

"There," said Charlie. "He says it was an accident. So it was. I saw it. I'm going home. He had best do the same."

The fern house was now almost crowded, and the electric light revealed the dilapidated figure that had once b

Mr. Betstein. Some sympathy was expressed—mostly in a tongue that shunned sibilants—for the victim of the accident; but from shadowy nooks came the sound of the human giggle, and from the palm house the sound of inhuman laughter.

Mr. Betstein was compelled to walk through the midst of the groups who were in the palm house, and through those in the room beyond, and then through the rows of footmen, who overdid the solemnity that they assumed to an extent that made their expression more irritating than if they had laughed outright. Through all the pitiless electric light shone.

The cheers of the crowd of loafers that greeted Mr. Betstein's exit from the gates of Saxe-Coburg House to his hansom were heard distinctly within the mansion.

"You young rascal!" said Charlton to Charlie in a low tone, and with a suppressed laugh. "You know that you threw that poor man into the pond."

"My goodness! Didn't you hear him declare solemnly that it was an accident?" asked Charlie. "If you mean to call him a liar, just say so, and I'll let him know in the morning. You'll have to fight him then, not me."

"Then you did fight him?"

"Look here, Charlton," said the midshipman. "You go home as soon as you can, and tell Mrs. Charlton that you came in here and found that little Jew with the big diamond stud—I wish it was mine, I'd sell it—crawling like a slimy thing—don't you forget the slimy thing—out of the pond; and say that you found me standing on the other side of the pond with my knuckles a bit barked, but nothing the worse; and, above all, don't forget to say that the chap confessed that it was an accident."

"What do you mean by all these instructions?" asked Charlton. "What do you mean by telling me to go home *to my wife*? Is she not here?"

"You don't deserve to be a husband, Charlton. Mrs. Charlton felt unwell and went away more than an hour ago."

"Why didn't you find me and tell me that long ago?"

"I could neither find you nor Miss Travers."

"What has Miss Travers got to say to the matter?"

"Nothing whatever—only you had gone off with her, goodness knows where."

"You are an impudent young ass, and you'll get yourself into trouble yet," said Charlton, turning round and walking away with clouded brow.

Charlie Barham stood aghast. This was the way he was being treated by the husband of the lady who had been so grossly insulted, and so amply avenged! Was it for this he had barked his knuckles on the white teeth of Mr. Betstein?

"I wonder if you know as much mathematics as would pass you for sub-lieutenant," said a low voice behind him.

He turned. Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh was standing in the shadow of a palm.

"I know as much mathematics as would pass me for an admiral of the fleet," said Charlie. "No man in the British Navy can possibly know more than a senior midshipman. I'm senior midshipman. We represent the breaking strain of education in the navy. It takes a chap nearly all the rest of his life forgetting what he knew when he was senior midshipman. There are even some admirals who haven't quite forgotten all—they are not many, however."

"And is there any particular ship you'd like to have a berth in when you do pass?"

"Rather! Let me once get aboard the *Mollymawk* and I'm a made man."

"*The Molly*—what?"

"Great Admiral! You have never heard of the *Mollymawk*—Mediterranean squadron?"

"I'm ashamed to say that I never did."

"And you are something in the government?"

"Something. The *Mollymawk*. Good-night to you."

He moved away before Charlie could raise his barked knuckles in the direction of his forehead.

The lad remained pensive for a few minutes. Then he gradually realized that the interview which he had just had with the Minister of Annexation was the most important in which he had ever had a share. The interviews which he had had with naval dignitaries did not invariably leave a satisfactory impression when they had passed. Here, however, was a dignitary who, though he had not attained to the brass button and cocked hat degree of eminence, was still regarded as occupying a respectable position, and the result of the interview with him was of a most pleasing nature.

"Unless he's the most confounded sneak in the world, I'm a made man," said Charlie.

He executed a few steps of a graceful dance known as the hornpipe, and then became suddenly thoughtful. The night was getting on, the ices would not last forever. The soup stage was approaching—soup in cups.

He made a very wry face in anticipation of this period of decadence, and went off to secure another ice—not pineapple—while yet there was time.

He succeeded. The demand for ices had become languid. He was helped to one that was not quite so solid as it might have been. It was his seventh. It was very refreshing. Then he wondered if there was any champagne cup handy.

CHAPTER XLV.

ON THE APPROACH OF DAWN.

BERTHA sat alone in her drawing room awaiting the return of Julian. She could not tell him what had occurred. How could she bring herself to repeat the words that that man had spoken in her ear in that luxurious apartment beyond the Cairo doorway? She shuddered as she recalled the words. What sort of men were these who were asked to the houses of presumably respectable—certainly wealthy—people? Were there many like the one whom she had just met, she wondered.

She had an impulse to fly—anywhere—anywhere—away from London and London society. Julian had told her that she would be received with enthusiasm in London, where the people were not so narrow-minded as those in Brackenshire. He had spoken truly. She had been welcomed into society; and this was what it meant—this feeling of horror and loathing—not only of the wretch who had insulted her, but of herself. She was conscious that a change had come over her. She felt that she was no longer the pure-minded girl who had worshiped the most beautiful ideals and had endeavored to realize them in her daily life. She had worshiped the ideal love, and her worship had led to this feeling of self-abasement—of humiliation to a lower depth than had ever been reached (she thought) by any other woman who had ever lived in the world.

And then she suddenly remembered the way in which Julian had gone from her presence in this very drawing room. Bitterness that she could not account for had been in his tone.

Could she account for it now?

Was it possible that her eyes were only now opened to her position, while Julian's had been open all the time? Was it possible that he had ceased to have that respect for her which a husband should have for his wife, if they were to live together in harmony? Was it possible that he retained for Marian Travers that feeling which he had had for her—according to Charlie Barham's story—before the steamer had anchored off St. Helena?

He had been by the side of Marian Travers all the evening; and, perhaps, the reason why he did not return to his house was that he preferred remaining by the side of Marian Travers.

This was the last of Bertha's tumult of thoughts.

She rose from her chair, and stood leaning against a cabinet above which a mirror hung. She saw the reflection of her pale face in the glass by the light of the wax candles in the sconces. The face seemed to her that of a stranger, and, moreover, a stranger for whom she entertained no feeling of regard.

Was her life wrecked?

When Julian returned he appeared to her also in the light of a stranger, so great was the strain to which she had been subjected by her tumultuous thoughts.

He expressed his regret that she had been indisposed. Perhaps she had been doing too much lately. He was sorry he had not heard that she had left Saxe-Coburg House until late in the night, he said.

"It was a pity that you had to leave so early," he added. "We had a great scene—I would not have missed it for worlds. It appears that our young friend Charlie has been entertaining an ancient grudge against a certain Mr. Betstein—a fellow who was left a few millions by his father—and he thought he could not do better than fight it out with Betstein in one of the greenhouses. He fought

it out, and threw his enemy into a pond about three feet in depth. We entered the greenhouse just in time to see the unfortunate fellow working his way up one of the banks as far from Charlie as possible. Why are you so excited? Your nerves are really not the thing, Bertha.

"No, no, I am not nervous, only—did Charlie—did anyone say what was the origin of the quarrel?" asked Bertha, breathing hard.

"It was most amusing," said Julian. "Charlie shouted across the pond to the fellow: 'Here is Mr. Charlton, who wants to know if you fell in by accident'; and the fellow said that it was an accident. You never saw anything so comical as the appearance of the bedraggled wretch as he sneaked out through the people who were standing about the palm house. Talk of a drowned rat——"

"And Charlie did not say one word of how the quarrel originated?"

"Not a word. It was when I taxed him with having thrown the man into the pond that he told me you had gone home—yes, he told me not to forget to tell you what had happened, and to mention that the fellow had said that he had fallen into the pond by accident. You should have gone to bed, Bertha, the moment you came in. We have to go out again to-morrow night, you must remember."

"I never want to go out anywhere again," she cried. There was a moan in every word.

"Absurd!" said he. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, take me away from here, Julian—anywhere—anywhere—only away from here. I think I shall die or go mad if I remain here any longer."

She had thrown herself down on a sofa and buried her face on one of the arms.

He watched her for some moments. Clearly her nerves had been overstrung by whatever had occurred.

What was it that had occurred?

He watched her silently. All at once he remembered having seen Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh in the course of the night. A terrible thought seized him in its grasp.

"We could not have been more than an hour at that place when you were—let us say, indisposed," he remarked.

"Not more, I am sure," she said without looking up.

"Then how were you brought here? The brougham was not to return until one o'clock."

"Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh was good enough to offer me his brougham," she replied. "He only intended remaining a short time, and the brougham waited for him."

"Quite so," said he after a pause. "That was very obliging of Sir Ecroyd. I think I shall go to the smoking room, if you don't mind. My cigarette will not improve your condition, and I can see that you are in a state of nervous prostration."

"No, no, do not go," she moaned. "Stay with me; God knows I need you—someone who can help me."

"How can I help you?" said he coldly. "I cannot hope to be a help to a woman whose will is sufficiently strong to make the strongest men her slaves. I am only a poor thing. You have shown yourself to be stronger than I could ever hope to be. I can only leave you alone. Your own thoughts will, no doubt, be a help and a comfort to you at this time."

He had left the room before she could speak—before she could comprehend what his words meant.

What did his words mean?

She tried to think, but utterly failed in her attempt. The tone that he had adopted was exactly the same as that which had caused her to leave the drawing room at the Court.

In an instant she sprang to her feet.

"Oh, my God!" she cried wildly. "Can it be possible that he has lost all respect for me, as I have lost all for

myself? Do men change like this when they have lived with a woman for a few months? Is that love which was the foundation of this union of ours no more certain basis than that ceremony which goes by the name of marriage?"

No more certain? When had she ever heard of a man such as Julian Charlton, when less than two months married to such a woman as herself, adopting such a tone of bitterness as she had just heard from his lips?

Young wives had told her of the trials to which they had been subjected owing to the shortness of temper of their respective husbands. But she had never heard a complaint respecting the first six months of marriage. It nearly always took a year to develop the husband's temper to the swearing point. Was it possible that the bond of union which existed between herself and Julian was weaker than the other bond to withstand the daily strains of life? And with these vain questionings there was forced upon her the most important inquiry of all: "If the first two months of our union have ended like this, what future may we anticipate?"

Once more she was lying on the sofa with her face buried upon one of its pillows. She felt that she could not face such a future as appeared before her eyes.

And the most hopeless aspect of the case was that she felt that she loved him as much as she had ever done. She loved him so well that she felt strong enough to separate herself from him for evermore, if that would make him happy.

It had actually come to this. She no longer fell back on the assurance that they were bound together by a tie that admitted of no severing—the tie of love—God's best gift to man—the bondage of soul to soul.

She had never spent so miserable a night in all her life. As the exquisite dawn forced its way through the blinds of the room and glimmered upon the various objects having

smooth surfaces, a longing seized her to return to her old home among the blue gums and the interminable pastures that she knew so well. Why had she ever left that land? People had laughed and shaken their heads on hearing of her intention to travel, and to learn by observation what life in various parts of the world meant. They had been right when they had suggested in their own way, and so far as anyone can suggest anything to a young woman with an income of twelve thousand a year, that she had no business to set out on a search of this nature.

It had come to this with her.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ON THE PLUNGE.

HE watched her as he gave Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates of Shantyville, Ky., the best advice in his power respecting the most effective design for the costume she had set her heart on wearing at a certain fancy ball. It was to take place in July, at a hotel which an American millionaire was about to hire for a week for the entertainment of his friends.

They were standing in joyous groups around one of the great drawing rooms of Lady Ashenthorpe's town house, which, as everyone knows, is in Grosvenor Gardens. Lady Ashenthorpe, so soon as she perceived that Bertha was invited everywhere in London, had no hesitation in leaving cards upon her, and asking her, not to the dinner which Lord Ashenthorpe had suggested, but to this "At Home," which was supposed to be very select, only four or five hundred persons having been invited.

Bertha and Julian had, of course, been forced apart shortly after reaching the drawing rooms ; and now he was in Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates' group, and she was seated between a Royal Academician and her old friend the Parliamentary Nuisance. The government were in great hope that, by judicious treatment of the Nuisance, he might be made as intolerable to the enemies of the government as he now was to the members of the government themselves. A dead wall which, upon ordinary occasions, may seem but an irritating blot on the landscape, may, in time of war, serve as an invaluable protection to a skirmishing party. When an unpleasant question was put to the head of any depart-

ment, the Nuisance was put up to ask of the same right honorable gentleman a counter-question tending to show that the opposition should be the last people in the world to ask the original question. In the five minutes bickering which followed between the Speaker, the Nuisance, and the inquiring opposition, the head of the department was usually able to escape returning a direct answer to the irritant. The Nuisance had thereby become a *persona grata* with the government, and received invitations to the ordinary departmental entertainments. He had thus almost come to think of himself as an actual member of the government.

Julian watched Bertha talking to the Royal Academician—he had a few pictures still unsold which he thought would serve admirably to indicate to an Australian colony the existing state of English art. (His estimate of their value was certainly a correct one, assuming that a period of decadence in English art has set in.)

But while she was talking to the Royal Academician she was also listening while the Nuisance recounted to her his recent triumphs. He had actually been called to order four times in the course of the previous day, which was, of course, Tuesday.

Julian watched her while he was giving his advice to Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates regarding the costume. Royalty, it was generally understood, was anxious that Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates should do credit to the greatest republic the world has ever known. Royalty was naturally interested in protecting the greatest republic from the possibility of a charge of incompleteness being leveled against it by anyone who might fancy that Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates was not a great social success, in the British drawing room as well as in the principality of Monte Carlo.

The fundamental principle of the forthcoming fancy ball was as graceful as it was original. The characters were not

to represent such abstractions as Night—silver stars over black lace ; or Winter—plenty of swansdown and holly ; or Gretchen—a fair wig ; or Commercial Enterprise—a Salvation lass's uniform ; or Pleasure—gauze wings ; or the Drama in England—short petticoats and a cigarette. These abstractions were not to find a place at the entertainment. The characters were to be got up on the principle of illustrating lines of poetry. "Believe me if all those endearing young charms" was the line that Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates hoped to illustrate. It was said that royalty had suggested her adopting it, discountenancing a line she had chosen from a bard of the greatest republic that the world had ever known—"I want a chaw of terbaccer, and that's what's the matter with me." What did Mr. Charlton think of the matter, she wondered.

Mr. Charlton thought that a capital line for a young American widow would be "Silent, upon a peak in Darien,"

"Upon how much?" asked Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates.

"A peak in Darien," said Julian. "All you will have to do is to remain speechless for the entire evening."

"You are the most impolite gentleman I have met since I came to Europe," said Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates. "You know as well as I do that if I desiderated that character I'd burst my corsets trying to contain my speech. Besides, I don't take piques—if I did I opine that I should leave you to freeze here ; and as for peaks in Nary Ann——"

"Darien," suggested Julian.

"Oh, get along with you!" cried Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates, with a lunge in tierce of her fan. "I don't go to Habakkuk G. Hopkins' saloons as anything that hints at silence. No. What's the matter with 'Believe me if all those endearing young charms'?"

"Nothing whatever," said Julian.

She was still sitting by the side of the Academician, he

could see. But was there not a certain anxious, expectant look in her face?

What did that look mean?

Was she counting the moments till someone should arrive?

The Green Scandinavian Band was heard in the distance. It was performing a selection from "Lucrezia Borgia," and had just reached the charming bolero, "Il segreto per esser felice."

He listened, and watched, and laughed.

"Il segreto per esser felice."

Had he found it? Was he any nearer the discovery than he had been six months ago? Was the secret to be attained by watching the girl who had laid down for his sake all that woman holds dear?

He knew in the depths of his heart that she was faithful to him; but it is not into the depths of his own heart that a man looks when the madness of jealousy seizes hold upon him. It is not even into the depths of his own reason. If *Othello* had taken a pencil and a slate and had made a small calculation, he would have found out, if he possessed the rudiments of mathematics, that it was impossible that *Desdemona* could have been unfaithful to him.

Julian Charlton could not apply the most ordinary reasoning to his own case in regard to Bertha. That whisper was still in his ear: "She is bound to you by no tie that may not be severed in a moment."

Several men approached her. Most of them were well known in the world. He could see that, all the time she was talking with them, the same unsatisfied look was on her face. Was she not watching and waiting for someone who had not yet come to her side?

After a few minutes he saw her moving out of the room with her hand on the arm of a distinguished peer who was the head of Lord Ashenthorpe's department.

His eyes followed her. How beautiful she looked ! There was no woman in the room who could compare with her. For a moment he felt proud of her ; but in another instant that cold doubt returned to him. He felt, when looking at her, as a man might feel who is in possession of a certain charming property, but who knows that he has no title-deeds, and that, consequently, he may be turned adrift at any moment. What is the noblest property in the world to anyone so long as the title-deeds are in the possession of someone else ? What was all the grace of that woman to him so long as he felt that she was bound to him by no tie that was recognized by the law ?

That was precisely what his relationship with her amounted to.

Then the Green Scandinavians passed from the "Lucrezia" selection to one from "Rigoletto." "Il segreto per esser felice" had dwindled into "La donna è mobile." The cynical phrases with the mocking laughter came to his ears.

The assurance that "la donna è mobile" was not comforting to him in his present mood. If woman was fickle how could he ever hope to retain Bertha, so long as there was no bond between them ?

Then, like many other men suffering from a like malady, he gave a sort of "it-will-all-be-the-same-in-a-hundred-years" laugh, and plunged.

It is on record that some men, in the absence of the title-deeds of the estates on which they were living, began a steady course of drinking, with a view to avert their thoughts from the subject of those same title-deeds. Others have been known to take to pigeon shooting at Hurlingham. Several have commenced throwing away their money in the maddest way, while others have endeavored to accomplish this purpose by means of backing horses to win certain races. *The fruit of that counterfeit tree of knowledge*

which grows in the middle of Fool's Paradise is among the least satisfying of the products of the vegetable kingdom.

Perhaps, on the whole, the best way of diverting one's thoughts from a catastrophe which one feels to be impending is to plunge, as Julian Charlton did, into a crowd of men and women and cast all care and sense to the winds.

He found himself once more in Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates' group, and he laughed louder even than Mrs. Cyrus P. Bates at some jest of unspeakable silliness. He got to the side of a young woman who had obtained a reputation in society for being ill-treated by her husband, and who was, consequently, treated with such lavish kindness by other men—anxious, no doubt, to counterbalance the domestic brutality of which she was a victim—that it was surprising the husband did not complete his villainy by bringing her into the divorce court. Julian Charlton plunged with her. He took her hand and looked into the center of those black ovals where her eyes were situated. Did she not yearn for sympathy, he asked her. She returned his pressure, and, after an eloquent pause, wondered where she could have an ice.

"Great Heavens! is it come to that?" he cried. "O Heavens! that men should be such brutes!"

She looked at him and sighed.

"I never complain," she murmured. "It is my lot. The sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep. We must be resigned."

"Poor child! Poor child!" he murmured. "You are all unmeet for a wife. You are not a woman—you are a flower—in everything but the flower's frailty."

"You are dangerous," she whispered.

"I know it," he answered. "For God's sake don't look at me like that. You do not know what it is to have a *strong man's* soul in your keeping."

"You are dangerous—terribly dangerous!" she whispered again. "I should so much like an ice."

She put her hand on his arm and he led her down among the palms—there are more palms in London during the season than may be found in the densest of African forests—among the palms, and the faint lights, and the soft sounds of the Green Scandinavians, and provided her with the ice for which she was longing. He himself inquired for a brandy and soda. He seated himself beside her on the low divan, that seemed nothing but a confused mass of satin cushions, and talked to her in whispers.

While he sat there a man passed by the nook apparently without noticing him, and went up the staircase.

He knew the figure of Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh.

Another man appeared, and glared through the palm leaves. He was a very young man and had the reputation for being the most comforting of all the ill-treated lady's comforters.

"Come in," said Charlton; "there's lots of room for everybody here. I am only an understudy."

"Come in, if you are a good boy," said the ill-treated lady. "I am not sure that you are a good boy. I don't like that look of yours. It verges on the sulky."

"I've been looking for you," said the youth. "You might have remained upstairs for a bit, I think."

"Go away—go away," said the lady. "I won't have any sulky boys near me."

"The understudy gracefully yields to the principal," said Julian, rising.

"What, you are going?" said the lady. "I don't think this is kind, just as you were getting interesting, too. I never found you an interesting person before, Mr. Charlton."

"Alas," said he. "Alas! If I do not go now, I may not be—never mind! Flight sometimes shows more bravery than fight."

He played the part very well, and he was aware of this fact. He felt a sort of artistic exultation at that moment. Clearly there were no better means of diverting unpleasant reflections than this. It was infinitely superior to brandy, that refuge of the inartistic. To be sure, he had had some brandy in some soda water, but not such a quantity as would make an appreciable difference to him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ON THE MOMENT AFTER THE PLUNGE.

AT the door of one of the drawing rooms he was met by Marian Travers, as usual, with a new chaperon—a very decrepit one this time, with shoulder blades and the title of marchioness. She certainly seemed to possess more shoulder blades than are allowed even to dowager duchesses.

"Who is that case of cutlery?" whispered Charlton, when he had pressed Marian's hand with the utmost tenderness.

"Hush," said she. "Lady Lyonesse has got the quickest ears of any human being."

"They are large," said he. "She is the barley crop of the peerage: all straw, beard, and ears."

The appearance of the dowager marchioness might, strictly speaking, have justified this description, for, undoubtedly, no one acquainted with the proportion of the human frame would look for so noble a frontal bust on a woman whose shoulder blades were developed with such extraordinary emphasis; and it could not be said that the lady's chin was perfectly smooth; but the accuracy of the description did not compensate for its suggestion of vulgar insolence.

"We must move away from here if you mean to talk in that strain," said Marian, smiling. She perceived in a moment what was Julian Charlton's mood. She had a faculty for perceiving the varying moods of men and of treating them accordingly. It was her discreet exercise of this faculty that had caused Cyril Southcote to ask her to be his wife.

"With all my heart," he replied. "I have found the most charming seat in the house—a nest among the palms on the first landing."

"You are too absurd," said she. "Do you actually fancy that I——"

"I do," he said. "I know my own heart, and when a man knows his own heart he has gone a long way toward knowing the heart of the one who is nearest to him."

"Nearest to him, did you say?" she asked in a low tone.

"You did not fancy that nearest was the word that I said?" he murmured. "And yet—well, I dare say you are discreet; better assume that I said nearest, not——"

"Hush," she whispered with her lips and her fan. "Let us sit here where we can watch the crowd."

"What are they to us?" said he.

"Nothing whatever—more than wives and *fiancées*, and controllers of income tax, and the controllers of the controllers of the income tax—ministers of grace and ministers of annexation."

"Who are just the opposite, you would seem to suggest."

"By no means; only it is remarkable how one's professional instincts are sometimes carried into one's social life. The Minister of Annexation."

"Where is that person just now?" asked Julian.

"Sir Ecroyd, do you mean?" asked Marian. "Why, where should he be unless by the side of the most beautiful woman in London? Mrs. Charlton is to be congratulated upon her conquest. He came into the room just now and crushed his way up to her at once. And everyone looks on him as a confirmed woman-hater. Of course she is only amusing herself with him."

"Where are they now?" asked Julian.

"Goodness knows ; they must have gone off by another door. You are quite right, this place is stifling."

She rose and hastened to the door.

He laughed, but the impression which his laugh conveyed was exactly the same as that produced by a sob.

"There is nothing stifling in my palm nook," said he. "Put your hand on my arm. What, can you not trust me?" he whispered, with a reproachful glance. He flattered himself that he was becoming more of an artistic success every moment.

"Trust you?" said she. "Alas, it is not you whom I cannot trust."

"I am glad of that," he murmured. "You are right. Oh, those days which we had together on the Flats, with Table Mountain in the distance!"

They had descended. A glance assured him that, as he had anticipated, the ill-treated lady and her comforting youth had disappeared from the seat among the palms. There were much more secluded nooks upstairs where the guests rarely ventured. The ill-treated lady was, however, adventurous.

"Could anything be more grateful or gracious?" said Julian, as Marian sank into the embrace of the great satin cushions, catching a glimpse at the same instant of the point of a fan projecting beyond the gilt edge of a Louis Seize screen a few yards behind where Julian was standing. Above the screen, toward a Seaforth palm and beneath its fronds, there was, she knew, a seat. She had often seen and coveted that fan. Even now, catching a glimpse of the top of it, her thought was :

"It might have been mine if the steamer had not called at St. Helena."

"Is the nook less entrancing than I painted it?" asked Julian.

"It is Paradise," she murmured.

"It is—it is," he said, seating himself slowly by her side. It was not a particularly capacious divan. "Paradise," he continued. "Paradise. Yes—down to the forbidden fruit."

A ripple of laughter as low as that which makes the pebbles whisper "hush" by the moonlight on the strand the ripples love to kiss.

"And the tempter," she murmured.

"Not I—not I," he said. "I am the tempted."

"Not you, Mr. Charlton," she cried, with another ripple of laughter.

"Heaven knows," he murmured. "What were our words together before we parted last night?"

"Heaven knows; I have forgotten."

"I have not."

"Better forget; I have made up my mind to forget them. If I had not I should not have allowed you to speak to me as a friend to-night."

"But you have allowed me."

"But that subject is banned."

"Why should it be banned?"

"Oh, you make me lose all patience with you," she said in a louder tone. "The most beautiful woman in England—so a man remarked as your wife entered—the most beautiful woman in England is your wife."

"No," he replied in the same tone; "I have no wife."

"Mr. Charlton!"

"I tell you what is the truth: I have no wife."

"You mean to tell me that you are a free man?"

"I am a free man."

"I could not have believed it. I remembered how Mrs. —how—well, you cannot forget how everyone aboard the steamer believed that she was the daughter of a convict. I *thought* that she had only aimed at making a fool of

Lady Rushton. I took it for granted that you were married."

"Then you took too much for granted; we were never married."

"And yet everyone visited her."

"That is everyone's own lookout. Oh, I cannot talk over this miserable business."

He had risen to his feet.

She rose with some reluctance. What was the good of his making this confession if he meant to go away, she wondered.

"It is a miserable business," she remarked as she put her hand on his arm. "You have my sympathy—all the sympathy of my heart."

"Thank you, thank you," said he as he led her up the staircase. His mood had changed in a moment. The force of making that confession—of saying those words, "she is not my wife," had altered his mood in a moment. He had no further desire to plunge. The conditions of the pastime in which he had been indulging were changed. It was becoming dangerous.

There was protection in the neighborhood of the shoulder blades of the marchioness. He saw them gleaming like crossed sabers in a trophy of arms.

"You have my sympathy," she murmured. "Do you not believe me? Oh, here is that tiresome Cyril. You will not leave me with him?"

"I have no choice," said he.

"You are a weak man," said she, somewhat scornfully. "You were weak once before, and misery was the result; you are weak again, and must I have thought for both of us?"

He did not answer. The mood of acting had passed from him. She had made him an artistic failure because she had insisted on taking him seriously. What chance has

the comedian if you stop him every now and again to insist on his explaining his jokes?

Julian considered himself lucky when Lord Ashenthorpe took him by the arm and led him away to intrust him, as an old friend, with the sacred duty of entertaining the wife of the chief of his department.

"I am in luck," said Cyril to Marian. "Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh met me on the stairs just now—he was coming up with Charlton's wife—and in ten words offered me a capital post in the administration of the newly acquired Calipash Islands. I told him our relations, and he shook his head. 'Try the Calipash Islands for a year at any rate before you think of marriage,' said he. That was all. What shall I say to him?"

"I give you Sir Ecroyd's advice," she replied. "Try the Calipashes for a year, and let it be understood in the meantime that we are not fettered by any engagement."

"Oh, no, not that," said he.

"But I insist on it," she cried. "I begin to think that you are a poor thing."

"And I am only beginning to think that you are the most generous woman in the world," said he. "To tell you the truth, I got a letter to-day from my father. It is very rough and contains some passages regarding the aspects of marriage as associated with starvation, which are too indelicate even for a father who is noted for his indelicacy."

"Had you not better go to Sir Ecroyd and tell him that you accept the post?" said Marian.

"I have already accepted it," said he. "I knew that I could rely on your good sense."

"Did you?" said she with more than a touch of scorn, for no girl likes to be accused of good sense. "Did you? Then that only makes me the more certain that there should be no engagement between us. I dare say you have to thank *Mrs. Charlton* for having pleaded for you, so you would be

acting wisely to tell Mr. Charlton that you mean to thank his wife, whose influence over Sir Ecroyd is so marked. You might also add what I have said about our engagement."

"It will require tact," said Cyril; "but I flatter myself that I am not only equal to the task of administering the government of the Calipash Archipelago, but also to the task of making the needful explanation of gratitude to Charlton."

He went off with a light heart in search of Charlton; but his capacity was not equal to the task of approaching him; for when Charlton had entertained, so far as was in his power to entertain, and so far as it was in her power to receive entertainment, the wife of Lord Ashenthorpe's chief, he put on his hat and his overcoat and took a walk as far as Hampstead. As Hampstead is some miles from Grosvenor Gardens, it was almost six o'clock in the morning before he got to his own house. He had been walking hard for five hours, but he had not succeeded in getting rid of that feeling of self-abasement which had possessed him the moment he had said those words, "She is not my wife," to Marian Travers.

It was on the heights of Hampstead that the truth came to him. He knew how much he loved Bertha. He knew that he had behaved basely to her—that he had made her life wretched. False to him! Was he a fool that, believing she could be false to him, he should leave her alone and walk northward miles away from her? He knew now that his jealousy was madness. And yet this madness had had such an effect upon him that he had said those words—those false words, to a girl whom he almost despised—"She is not my wife."

He would go to Bertha in the morning and confess all, and ask her forgiveness, and then——

What then?

Was he certain that he should never again hear those words whispered in his ear, "She is bound to you by no tie"?

He had almost reached his own house before he had resolved that he would implore of her to marry him as the people around them married. If she refused his entreaty he felt that he was strong enough to leave her.

It would be better for him to leave her forever than to continue making her life wretched.

When he opened his door with his latchkey he went upstairs and into one of the bedrooms. Hastily taking off some of his clothes, he threw himself, thoroughly exhausted in body and spirit, on the bed and slept soundly for some hours.

Awaking, he found that it was almost noon. He hastened to his bath-room and thence to his dressing room. He started, seeing his haggard face in a glass.

His man brought him a letter, and then inquired what clothes he meant to wear—did he mean to ride before luncheon, or was he going to drive.

The letter was in Bertha's handwriting; it contained only a few words.

"I overheard what you said. You are right. You are free."

"When did Mrs. Charlton go out?" he asked the man.

"Very early, sir. Having to catch the 8.35 she had to leave here at eight."

"I wonder did she go by Paddington," said he.

"No, sir, by Waterloo; I heard her direct the hansom driver."

"That is a quarter of an hour longer," said Julian. "Better tell them downstairs that I shall lunch alone in half an hour."

"Yes, sir. And you will wear the light grays, sir?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

The man left the dressing room, his mind satisfied as to the exact tint of the trousers his master meant to wear.

The next moment his master had fallen into a chair, staring with wild eyes at that paper which he held in his hand.

"Too late—too late," were the words that his lips sought to frame.

All his thoughts found expression in those words. His repentance had come too late.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ON THE BEGINNING OF A QUEST.

HE went to the room that she had occupied. The maids had not invaded it. The impression that that white body had made in the bed was still visible. The pillow bore the impression of her fair head. He put his face down to it. The instant he did so he shuddered. There was a cold dampness on the pillow that caused him to feel as if he had touched the face of one who was just dead.

He knew that the pillow had been wet with her tears. He looked around the room to find, if it were possible, some clew to her flight. In what direction had she gone? She had ordered the hansom to drive to Waterloo Terminus. Had she taken the train at Waterloo? If so, what station had her ticket been for? At whose suggestion did she go to that station, whatever it was?

No letter, no paper, no clew did he find.

He went downstairs to his solitary lunch, glancing casually at the newspaper as the dishes were being brought in. He flattered himself that none of the servants could notice any change in his demeanor. If the servants fancied that their mistress had fled from the house no earthly power could avert the scandal that would follow. It was his hope to find Bertha, to throw himself at her feet, and to persuade her to return with him.

After his walk to Hampstead he had, he remembered, made up his mind that if she refused to go through the ceremony of marriage with him he would leave her. She had taken the first step, however, and had left him alone.

When he had risen from the table all the burden of his

loneliness came upon him. If she would only come back to him he would not insist on any conditions. She must come back—she must ! Even though he had sinned against her, she was a woman and she would forgive him. He was unworthy of her—he was a brute ever to have—no, not suspected her, only fancied that he had suspected her.

He had been mad—mad—mad as no man had ever been before. That jealousy had been madness—it had possessed him all those days, making him incapable of reasoning. She had given up her pure life to him, and yet he had been jealous when other men had been near her. That was a monstrous thing, he felt. Let him but get her back, and he would compass her with his love so that her life would be one long dream of happiness.

That is what some men think when their wives are dead. They usually marry again at the end of the year ; but their new dream of happiness is not more enduring than the honeymoon.

With all Julian Charlton's reflections, he never entertained the idea of the possibility of blame being attached to himself for having failed to protect Bertha from her own theories of life and of the union of a man and a woman. It never occurred to him that he was deserving of reproach for having made up his mind to possess her, although feeling in his heart that her theories—she called them *principles*—were founded upon a perfect knowledge of what man and woman *should be*, not of what man and woman *are*. He had come to perceive in the course of his life in the midst of various communities that, while many persons took a great pleasure in promulgating theories respecting the world to come, no large proportion of such persons considered themselves called on to make their own lives illustrative of the value of their theories.

And yet, for the sake of possessing that girl, he had actually pretended to her that he believed that her theories

would constitute a sound practical rule of life. It was not, however, upon this point that he reflected now that he found himself alone. All his thoughts were turned to the question of how to bring her back to him.

In what direction was he to look for her?

If he suspected her of the least measure of unfaithfulness to him even in thought, he would certainly have at least considered the possibility of her being near the man who had aroused his jealousy. But now it seemed that he was in his right mind—that the madness of jealousy had left him, for he never entertained the notion that she might have been controlled in her action by Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh.

In what direction was he to look for her?

After some thought he came to the conclusion that the fact of her having given the driver of the hansom directions to go to Waterloo meant nothing. She would probably have given the man another direction when he had taken her some distance away. Then the thought flashed across him: "Why might she not have returned to her aunt in Chelsea?"

He started up from where he had been sitting and seized his hat. He could hardly doubt that she had gone to Chelsea. She would naturally seek to return to her former life, he felt. That would be the simplest step that she could take. He had heard long ago of young women threatening to return to their mothers at the first inconsiderate word that was uttered by their husbands. They rarely went back to their mothers; it was, unfortunately, their mothers who usually came to them, he knew, with a view of relieving the strained relations between the husband and the wife. There were on record, he believed, cases in which the interposition of the wife's mother failed to make the household life a perpetual harmony. However this might be, he felt that it was almost certain that Bertha had returned to the side of Mrs. Hardy. He had no desire for another inter-

view with Mr. Hardy. It was humiliating enough for him to feel that the prediction of this commonplace prophet had been amply realized, without the need for the extreme degradation of coming into the presence of the prophet with the confession that the prediction had been realized.

What did it matter how he was humiliated—how he was degraded, if only he succeeded in inducing Bertha to return to him?

He got into a hansom, and all the time that he was driving through the park and down Sloane Street he was thinking what he should say to her to induce her to return to him.

He did not arrive at a conclusion that could possibly be regarded as satisfactory. What words could he say to her that should make her forget the words which she had overheard when he had been by the side of Marian Travers?

The hansom pulled up at the house he had once known so well. The brass plate bearing the name of Mr. Hardy, and stating his connection with the Carnisolist Society, was extremely bright. From this fact he judged that the Hardys had just obtained a new maid servant.

He judged aright. After a preliminary scrutiny of him through two leveled laths of the Venetian blind at one of the windows, a strange servant opened the door. To ask a stranger if Mrs. Charlton was in the house would be to evoke a gaze of bewilderment that might make further inquiry difficult. He asked for Mrs. Hardy.

Mrs. Hardy was not in the house, and the servant declined to pledge her word as to the exact hour when she would return. Yes, Mr. Hardy was within.

He was. Before Julian had concluded his inquiries the secretary of the carnisolists appeared at the door of the room to the left. He was in his shirt sleeves and held a pen.

"What, Mr. Charlton?" he cried. "Pray come in, sir. What a summer we're having. The heat is abnormal—not

good for us, Mr. Charlton—not good for the carnisologists. Our membership increases materially in the winter. People don't mind binding themselves down to eat nothing but meat in the winter; but strawberries and new peas are great temptations. The flesh is weak at such times, Mr. Charlton, in every sense."

"Has my wife been here this morning, Mr. Hardy?" asked Julian, boldly coming to the point.

"Your—wife?" said Mr. Hardy slowly, pausing before saying the words, and making a considerable pause between them.

"My wife—Bertha—your wife's niece—is she here now? If she is, I must speak with her alone."

"My wife's niece is not here, Mr. Charlton—she paid us a visit in your carriage three weeks ago. She told us how she has been living. She has not been here since."

"You are quite sure?"

"Personally I have no doubt in the matter. She came three weeks ago to have an interview with Eric Vicars."

"With whom?"

"Vicars, her father's late overseer on one of the runs. A respectable young fellow. He has a large heart, Mr. Charlton, and has been occasionally sober latterly. He and Bertha were always good friends."

"Curse him!" cried Charlton. "Curse him! If I had not seen the way he looked at her and held her hand when you brought him aboard the steamer the day we landed, I should never have given in to her. I should have brought her to see how impractical her theories were, and we should now be happy."

"You have now come to see that you behaved like a scoundrel," remarked Mr. Hardy, as placidly as though he were making an ordinary statement.

"I do not want to discuss the matter with you, Mr. Hardy," said Julian. "Heaven knows that I am ready to

admit that I have been a scoundrel—anything—if it will only bring her back !”

“Then she has left you ?” said Mr. Hardy quietly.

“And she has not come here ?” said Julian.

“You may rest assured of that, Mr. Charlton. I cannot say that I am surprised to learn that you have separated. Separation was inevitable. You may perhaps remember that I said as much to you under your own roof. I need not inquire from you how the separation has come about. I know it. The Turks are supposed to be unusually jealous of their wives. They are wise ; they shut them up in their own apartments, and thereby they always feel that their wives are bound to them by even a stronger tie than that of a legal marriage. The husbands have thus few opportunities of being jealous. We English do not believe in the stone wall and iron bar union ; but we manage to minimize the possibilities of jealousy by making the marriage ceremony a religious one, and causing the vows of fidelity to be uttered before God. This is the more civilized way. The fact that the bond of marriage is usually regarded as a sacred one causes us—most of us, at any rate—to feel that our wives are bound to us by a tie that cannot be broken with impunity. There was no such tie in your union with my wife’s niece, Mr. Charlton. You had not a day’s easiness of mind with her.”

“All this may be quite true, Mr. Hardy,” said Charlton. “I tell you I did not come here to discuss the marriage question with you or anyone else, but to find my—to find her—and to persuade her to return with me. She must return with me ; I cannot live without her.”

He was walking up and down the room—the promenade was not an extensive one—and now he stood before Mr. Hardy with clenched hands.

“It is sometimes the case that when a man has lived for some months with a woman—some years even (but

these cases are not many)—he asks her to marry him," said Mr. Hardy. "The kitchen has usually got a good deal to say in the way of influencing a man in this direction. The woman has got to know what he likes to eat, and he will do anything—he will even marry her—sooner than be placed at the mercy of a stranger, who may insist on giving him underdone mutton, which he knows will make him see through the watches of the night such visions as would, if transferred to paper, serve as the best illustrations that could be devised for a guidebook to the Infernal Regions. But so far as you and Bertha are concerned——"

"I see that in looking to you for practical advice I was a fool," said Julian. "You talk in that strain, while you see that I am at the point of madness. For God's sake tell me what I am to do to find her and to bring her back."

"I do not know where she is, Mr. Charlton, so I cannot suggest to you in what direction you should look for her. As for bringing her back—well, I should advise you to wait."

"Wait—for what?" cried Charlton.

"Until she comes back of her own accord. I believe she will do it, because I believe that she loves you, but more because you are the father of a possible child of hers."

"A possible child, Mr. Hardy?" said Julian, bewildered.

"I said possible. If there is more than a possibility in the matter, you may depend upon it that she will return to you. You said that you are anxious that she should be married to you when she returns?"

"If I can only persuade her."

"Your powers of persuasion may be great, but they are as nothing compared with the powers possessed by *It*," remarked Mr. Hardy. "IT will command her to return and to marry you."

Julian Charlton dropped into a chair.

"I never thought of that, I never thought of that," he muttered. "My beloved—my beloved—away from me! Oh, Mr. Hardy, I must find her—I must find her! I confess that I was mistaken in you from the first. I did not think that you could understand us as you show you have understood us."

"I am not such a fool as that brass plate on the gate outside would suggest," said Mr. Hardy. "My wife has a thousand a year of her own, and if I prefer observing a peculiar class of men from the low standpoint suggested by that brass plate, that is my own business. Some people fancy that democracy is to become the most powerful element in society. They are wrong. The faddist is bound to become supreme. Good-day to you, Mr. Charlton. There is a good deal of humor to be got out of observing men and women, particularly those men and women who fancy they are taking part in a tragedy, when all the time they are acting a comedy. You suppose that you are the hero of a tragedy, I dare say—ah, good-day to you."

Julian Charlton was standing outside the gate with the brass plate before he succeeded in comprehending the general drift of Mr. Hardy's words.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ON THE EMBANKMENT.

HE strolled on in an aimless way until he found himself on the Embankment, idly gazing at the progress down stream made by a barge with brown sails, rigged in accordance with no recognized system.

This was how he spent an hour of the precious time which he meant to devote to the search for his beloved Bertha.

The fact was that the words which Mr. Hardy had just spoken to him had bewildered him. He could not remember all the words, but he knew that the general impression which they conveyed was not that they were uttered by an old fool. He had at one time looked on Mr. Hardy as something approaching an old fool, but not altogether an old fool; there was, he had felt, a certain reservation in his idiocy, but this was wholly filled up by knavery.

He now felt that it was necessary for him seriously to revise his opinion regarding Mr. Hardy. He had been a true, and not a false, prophet, Julian could not but acknowledge; and if some of his more recent utterances had not been quite so intelligible as might be wished, it could not be said that in this respect they differed so widely from the utterances of the majority of prophets that the world has known. Obscurity was inseparable from the style in which the professional seer delivered himself. He was, however, occasionally permitted to live to a ripe old age.

But on one point the prophet Hardy had not been obscure, and this point had the most important bearing upon the matter under consideration. (In this respect he

differed widely from the professional seer, who has, unfortunately, always been found deficient in clearness on the most important points.) Mr. Hardy had expressed the opinion that Bertha would certainly return to Julian.

But when Julian recalled the exact words of Mr. Hardy on this point—when he recalled what Mr. Hardy had advanced as the possible motive for her return, he got into a train of thought that caused his eyes to fill with tears and made him yearn to clasp his beloved one once more.

The possibility to which Mr. Hardy had alluded in the neuter gender, now appeared to Julian to be entitled to a greater distinction than could be embodied in the sexless pronoun.

Physiology as an applied science does not leave much margin for speculation ; but such as there was in the possibility alluded to by Mr. Hardy was traversed by Julian Charlton, as he strolled along the Embankment on this lovely July day.

The more he thought about this possibility, the greater became his passion to take Bertha once again into his arms. "Wait—wait," Mr. Hardy had said. That advice was all very good to come from Mr. Hardy ; but Julian felt that he would never be able to follow it. He could not wait for weeks and months—he did not know much about physiology or embryology, but he knew he might say months—he could not even wait for days. He must find her and bring her back at once.

But how—how—how ?

That was his cry as he quickened his pace. For more than half an hour that one word "How ?" kept ringing in his ears, until before him stood the towers of Westminster.

An irresistible impulse seized upon him when he looked up to the clock tower. He went through the gates. A member with whom he was acquainted had just come from the lobby.

"Hallo, Charlton, what on earth can bring you to this grimy place, when you might be on horseback in the park? Good Lord, man, are you a fool to take an interest in the rabble that are babbling and bickering inside that den?"

"I have come to see Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh," said Julian. "I suppose he is in the House?"

"He is either in his own room or in the library," said the member. "I'll find him for you. The arrangements here are so miserable that if you want to send a message—if only to a pressman in the gallery—you must trust it to a policeman, who trusts it to a telegraph boy; now and again I understand that a message has reached its destination after an hour or two. You have not made an appointment with the annexator-general?"

"No; but I think he will see me, if you are good enough to tell him that I am anxious for an interview."

"All right; come along with me. I feel when anyone respectable comes here—it's not often—like the acting manager of a theater when a bad piece is being played and some innocent acquaintance begs the favor of an order for the upper circle. We play damn bad pieces at this show of ours, and the privilege of giving orders to the performance is an empty one."

The light-hearted legislator left Julian in the outer lobby, and went off into the privileged regions beyond. He returned in a few minutes with the Minister of Annexation, and then hurried off to elude the Whip, whom he saw meditating a series of inquiries.

"I hope you will pardon my coming to you on a private matter, Sir Ecroyd," said Julian. "I knew that I should have no chance of seeing you at Piccadilly."

"I am very pleased, Mr. Charlton," said the minister. "Will you come to the room I have succeeded in annexing for myself? It cost me more trouble than the acquisition of the entire Calipash Archipelago."

Julian followed him to the room. It held an aroma of tobacco. It was liberally furnished with blue-books ; but the visitor did not fail to notice that the latest of Paul Bourget's novels lay, face downwards, across the arm of an armchair at a window.

"You are not such a fool as to go in for politics, Mr. Charlton?" said Sir Ecroyd, sweeping a pile of blue-books off a chair which he placed at the disposal of his visitor.

"No," said Julian mechanically, "no."

He was beginning to wonder why he had come here.

So was Sir Ecroyd.

"You are right, indeed," resumed the minister. "The time is fast approaching when it will be the same in England as it is in America—politics will be exclusively in the hands of the rabble."

"Sir Ecroyd," said Julian suddenly, "I have come to talk to you about my wife."

Sir Ecroyd's expression did not change to the extent of a hair's breadth.

"I beg your pardon," said he ; "your——"

"My wife," repeated Julian boldly.

"I did not know that you were a married man," said the minister.

"You know what my relations were with the lady who is accepted in the world as Mrs. Charlton," said Julian. "I have always regarded her as my wife. She told me that you understood our relations and sympathized with her views."

"So I did—so I do."

"We need not discuss the question now. I mean to be frank with you, Sir Ecroyd. She has left me ; you were the last person with whom she spoke ; I come to ask you if she said anything that would lead you to believe that she contemplated this step—if she said anything that would suggest to you where she meant to go. I must find her—I must find her, and bring her back to her home."

"The lady to whom I believe you allude," replied the minister in his measured parliamentary manner, "said not one word to me that would suggest that she meant to leave the house in which, I understand, she was living. I need not, however, conceal from you the fact that I perceived some time ago that she would leave that house."

"How did you perceive that, may I ask?" said Julian.

"How does a man perceive that, when the roots of a tree are rotten, that tree is bound to fall, Mr. Charlton? How does a man perceive that, when the foundation of a house is sand, that house will tumble about one's ears?"

"Where is the analogy?"

"I think it is apparent. There are so few instances on record in this country of a man and a woman living together happily for any length of time without having marriage as the foundation of their union, it is safe to assume, as I did, that such a *ménage* cannot be a permanent one."

"And I have no doubt that you were as frank with my— with her, as you are with me."

"I never discussed the subject with her. If I had done so I should certainly have been frank with her."

"She told me that you had sympathized with her."

"She told you the truth. I sympathized with her, I do so still. I sympathize with any woman whose weakness has been taken advantage of by a man, as her weakness was by you."

"You believe me to have been a scoundrel?"

"Most unquestionably I do."

"Great God! You love her—you love her—you have loved her all along—my instincts were not at fault."

"If your instincts led you to believe that I felt the deepest affection for that girl who has been your victim they led you in a right direction. I have had that feeling for her. I have it still. I looked forward to the time when

she would leave you, and thereby enable me to ask her to be my wife."

"Scoundrel!" cried Julian, "you are the scoundrel—not I! I can understand now how it is that men like you are sometimes found dead with a knife in their heart. You have taken her from me—you it was who urged her to leave me! But I shall find her and she shall return to me in spite of you; or if I fail to find her, I shall find you—you!"

Not a muscle did Sir Ecroyd move while he was being treated as the villain in a melodrama is treated by the virtuous and suffering hero under a passing cloud. Charlton might as well have made his impassioned gesture in the face of a statue of Tiresias of Thebes.

"I can understand how you feel, Mr. Charlton," said the minister in precisely the tone that he would have employed in explaining the position occupied by the government in respect of a South Pacific protectorate. "You naturally feel piqued at having lost the influence which you once possessed over the lady to whom you refer. I can understand the feeling of a man in the position which you are unfortunate enough to occupy."

"And I understand how much of that misfortune is due to your villainy," said Julian, turning upon Sir Ecroyd, when he had lifted his hat from the table where he had laid it. "I suspected you from the first moment I saw you. Now I know how well founded my suspicions were."

"Your suspicions were certainly correct, Mr. Charlton; but I blush to say that I refrained from making any attempt to induce the lady of whom we have been speaking to leave you. My conscience has reproached me for not endeavoring to precipitate an occurrence that I knew was inevitable."

"Your conscience!"

"Yes. I must confess that the night before last my conscience smote me when I found that poor young thing

at the point of death because some ruffian had offered her a sum of money to be his mistress instead of yours."

"No man did that," said Julian slowly. He had scarcely strength to speak. The words that he heard overwhelmed him. He could not at once understand their import.

"It is a terrible thing for a man to do—to place any woman in such a position as makes it possible for an insult like that to be offered to her."

"It never was offered to her—that insult," said Julian resolutely. "It is part of your trickery. I know it, now that I know you."

"Accept it as so if you wish; I do not urge anything on you. I have all along believed you to be quite unworthy of the love which she once bore for you. The fact that you were unable to perceive, when you found her at your house on your return the night before last, that something terrible had happened to her, proves with great clearness that you appreciate nothing of the beautiful nature with which you have been associated for some months."

"And you knew that that insult was offered to her, and yet, though professing to be her friend—nay, to have loved her—you allowed the wretch that insulted her to escape."

"He did not escape—not quite. It was left for a lad to administer the chastisement, and for you, who called yourself her husband, to occupy the humiliating position of a looker-on."

"What—do you mean?—oh, why do I remain here to suffer worse agonies than those of death?" muttered Julian passionately as he paced the room. "Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh, whether you believe me or not, I swear to you that I never had the least hint of what occurred to bring about that scene in the greenhouse. If I had known——"

"You could have done nothing, Mr. Charlton. That is

the pity of it. That is the pity of the situation. It is not the man's name that is dragged in the mire under such circumstances—it is the woman's. That lad who went about the grounds for an hour searching for the miscreant whom he meant to punish took the right view of the matter. He took care that the mire should cling to the right person—and it did. I do not suppose that you have anything more to say to me to-day, Mr. Charlton."

"Only this," said Julian. "You do not understand anything of the nature of—of—my wife, if you fancy for a moment that she does not consider herself bound to me by a bond that is far more indissoluble than the bond of marriage. With God's help I shall find her and bring her back to me. I will give up my life to the task of finding her."

"And if you succeed in persuading her to go back to you," said the minister, "I will admit that I have failed to appreciate her nature."

CHAPTER L.

ON PARLIAMENT AND THE PADDED ROOM.

JULIAN CHARLTON went out of the room without another word.

When the minister found himself alone he went slowly to the armchair at the window, and, having seated himself, sent his eyes wandering over the river beneath the terrace. The river at this place is like the interior of the House of Commons—it contains nothing that has a tendency to divert thought from any particular subject upon which thought may be directed. If the interior contained anything that might cause thought to be less concentrated upon a subject than it is at present, the Sarey Gamp and Betsy Prig form of debate, which is the model of the representatives of the people at their best just now, would become the Cæsar and Pompey style of a Carolina cotton field. This would be a degeneration—yes, to some extent.

Sir Ecroyd watched the shining river—it shines where the tar buckets have been washed—and his thoughts took a certain course.

It had happened—the event which he had laid his plans to bring about had happened. He meant that the man who had just left the room, and the woman of whom he had been talking, should be separated, and the separation had occurred.

He knew perfectly well how it had occurred. He was as certain of the accuracy of his belief on this point as he was

in regard to the nature of the insult that Mr. Betstein had offered to Bertha, though he had had no special information on either subject.

What he knew specifically was that he had been on a seat near the screen under the Seaforth palm in Lady Ashenthorpe's house on the previous night when Julian Charlton had brought the ill-treated wife to the divan in the picturesque nook ; that he had then gone in search of Bertha to bring her to the seat beyond the screen whence she might overhear whatever Julian might say to the lady whom he was entertaining among the cushions ; that, on returning with Bertha on his arm, he had found Julian Charlton's place taken by another and more entertaining man, who had speedily moved away, allowing Julian Charlton with Marian Travers to occupy the cushions. All this Sir Ecroyd knew ; and he was also aware of the fact that Bertha had overheard the words that Julian Charlton had spoken to Marian.

That, he believed, was how the separation had been brought about. Whether it had occurred with the accompaniment of a scene, or in the silent watches of the night, he did not know, nor did he greatly care. It was enough for him to feel that his plans had succeeded, only it had been rather a mistake to offer Cyril Southcote the appointment in order to leave Marian free for Charlton. Sir Ecroyd had hitherto devoted himself to the science of annexation ; but his success in an entirely different field convinced him that his adroitness was not subject to any narrow limitations : he could separate as well as annex.

Then he reflected upon his adroitness in dealing with the man who threatened to be troublesome. He had simply been frank with him. There are occasions when it is to the advantage of a cabinet minister to be straightforward. He was invariably straightforward on such occasions. He had been straightforward. The man had got into a pas-

sion ; but another dose of that unpalatable medicine of frankness, and he had quieted down.

In what direction should his adroitness be exercised now?

That was the question which presented itself to him as he rose from his chair, hearing the division bells clamoring for his presence, and put his novel under a blue-book. Then—of course without inquiring what the point was upon which the division was being taken—he went into the lobby with the other ministerialists. When the counting was over and the opposition were cheering at having gained a great moral victory—the opposition are great on morality when numerically they are about 150 less than the immoral government—Sir Ecroyd found himself beside the Minister for Public Safety.

"I wonder could you telephone to Tracey to be at my room in half an hour," he said to that minister.

"Certainly. What do you want with Tracey, anyway?" said the Minister for Public Safety."

"I want his advice about a threatening letter," said Sir Ecroyd, who did not feel it incumbent on him to be straightforward with his colleagues. His straightforwardness he used as an instrument for the chastisement of his enemies.

"A threatening letter? Better hand it over to my department."

"I'll have Tracey's advice first. What are they bellowing about now?"

The remark had reference to the business of the House, which seemed to demand a considerable amount of shouting and gesticulating from some of the members.

"The usual thing. The McBratney declines to withdraw the word liar as applied to General Anderson, the Orangeman who represents Ulster. You'll have to move the suspension of The McBratney if he is named."

"All right. Don't forget about Tracey."

Sir Ecroyd strolled round to the Treasury bench while the hooting, and bellowing, and blustering went on. Such persons as are curious on the subject of the padded room and the cerebral phenomena that tend to that apartment should not go to Colney Hatch. The House of Commons in a "scene" will serve their purpose admirably.

The McBratney stood disheveled, but defiant. He had been a pawnbroker's assistant in a small town in the County Carlow previous to entering the House of Commons, and his professional duties had given him a certain mastery of language, but had not imparted to him any delicate sense of local color in phraseology. The intoxicated laborer who had questioned his accuracy in calculating the utmost sum chargeable upon a corduroy waistcoat, he had pacified by calling him a liar. He had attempted, with indifferent success, the pacification of some of his opponents in the House of Commons by a free use of the same word; and now, owing to his deplorable deficiency of a sense of the local color attached to the word, he was about to be named by the Speaker.

The chief of The McBratney's party had just entered the House. He seated himself in front of The McBratney, who was becoming more disheveled and defiant every moment.

"Did you call the man a liar, sir?" asked the chief in a low tone.

"I did, yer honner," replied the honorable member.

"Then withdraw the word, sir," said the chief.

"But isn't he afther sayin'——"

"Withdraw the word; keep your blackguardism for the other side of the Channel."

The McBratney got sulkily to his legs.

"I withdhrah, Mr. Speaker," he muttered. Then seating *himself*, while the cheers rang from all sides—for this was,

it is scarcely necessary to say, another great moral victory for the opposition—the McBratney murmured in the sympathetic ear of his nearest colleague :

"I'm thinkin', Tim, if all the blayguardism was kep' on the other side of the Channel, it's not many of us would be here this day."

CHAPTER LI.

ON PRIVATE INQUIRY.

"WHERE is she to be found?"

That was the question which Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh was asking himself, when he was sitting on the Treasury bench amid the bellowing of the herd around him—it is marvelous how the herd will bellow if only the merest cur snaps at their heels.

"Where is she to be found?" he now asked himself as he went back to his room to meet the person whose name he had mentioned to the Minister for Public Safety.

Mr. Tracey was acknowledged to be the most astute of the detective force at Scotland Yard.

He was an excellent officer in spite of the fact that he had not yet received that guarantee of efficiency—dismissal by the Minister for Public Safety.

He was waiting at the door of Sir Ecroyd's room, while the "scenes" were being shifted in the House. He touched his hat when the minister appeared.

"You are there, Tracey? Good. I'll not keep you a minute."

"I am at your service, Sir Ecroyd."

He followed the minister into his room and closed the door.

"It is a woman, Tracey," said Sir Ecroyd.

"Of course, Sir Ecroyd," said the officer.

The minister paused. He wondered were many members of the cabinet in the habit of consulting detectives *regarding women*.

"I mentioned to Mr. Secretary just now that I had received a threatening letter—of course that was not true," said Sir Ecroyd.

"Of course," said Tracey.

Again there was a pause. Sir Ecroyd wondered if it was regarded as a matter of course that a statement made by a cabinet minister was false.

"I am greatly interested in this lady—she is a young woman."

"Of course, Sir Ecroyd—of course."

The assent was very emphatic this time, as if the detective deprecated the bare suggestion that he should assume that the lady was otherwise than young.

"Yes," said the minister. "She is young. She has a husband."

"Of course, Sir Ecroyd—of course—of course."

The assent was even more emphatic than before.

Sir Ecroyd wondered if all the world assumed that it was a matter of course that a cabinet minister should be interested in a woman—that that woman should be young, and that it was quite inevitable that that young woman should have a husband.

"She has a husband, but she separated from him this morning."

"Of co——"

"And I am anxious to know where she has gone, and also that her husband should not have this information."

"Of——"

"And, consequently, I have sent for you to manage it all for me. Her name is Mrs. Charlton. She has a great deal of money of her own. This is her likeness."

Sir Ecroyd took out of his breast pocket a case containing a beautifully finished miniature portrait on ivory of Bertha. It had been painted to his order from a photograph taken in accordance with his instructions by one of

those diabolical instantaneous processes, the discovery of which has added a new terror to life.

"She is the best horsewoman who has been in the habit of riding in the park," said the detective.

"What—you have seen her?"

"Frequently, Sir Ecroyd; she has a seat like an Australian."

"She is an Australian. I will write down the address of her husband for you. He is searching for her also. He will probably put the matter into the hands of Renard & Lupus. You will, of course, see them, and give them to understand that I do not want to be interfered with, for some time, at any rate. There will be no difficulty about that, I suppose?"

"Difficulty? Oh, dear, no, none in the world."

The detective smiled. The suggestion that there might possibly be some difficulty in inducing a private inquiry agent to sacrifice the interests of his employers in order to suit the convenience of another person, seemed to contain the elements of humor in the opinion of Mr. Tracey.

"Then I leave the matter in your hands, Tracey. I need hardly say that no expense need be spared."

"Of course not, Sir Ecroyd. The money is her own?"

"Altogether, I understand."

"That is our starting point. Do you happen to know who are her bankers?"

"No; but perhaps I can find out."

"There are several colonial banks, Sir Ecroyd."

"Inquiry can be made at all."

"And the lady's maiden name, Sir Ecroyd?"

"Miss Lancaster—Bertha Lancaster."

Mr. Tracey took a note of each item of information in a somewhat dilapidated pocketbook. He then picked up his hat.

"If the lady remains in London we shall have no

difficulty in finding her, Sir Ecroyd. Meanwhile, however—the—threatening letter?"

"Is a bogus one, in your opinion, Tracey—not worth following up."

"Quite so, Sir Ecroyd—not worth following up. Torn up, Sir Ecroyd—torn up and flung out of the window. Good afternoon, Sir Ecroyd."

In the lobby on his way out Tracey met the Minister for Public Safety, and touched his hat.

"Ah, Tracey; by the way—what about that letter?" said that minister.

"Practical joke, as usual, sir," replied Tracey. "Fraud in every line of it. Why, it wouldn't deceive a child, sir—a child! it wouldn't deceive an expert, sir."

"So clumsy as that? Where is it, Tracey?"

"Sir Ecroyd tore it up and threw it out of the window, sir. If I had only known that you wanted to see it, sir——"

"Oh, no, no; I don't want to see it. I wonder that Sir Ecroyd didn't perceive that it was not genuine."

Tracey touched his hat again, and departed into the comparatively pure air which may be breathed outside St. Stephen's.

In the course of an hour Mr. Tracey had visited the private inquiry offices of Messrs. Renard & Lupus, and had learned that a Mr. Charlton had intrusted them with the duty of discovering the whereabouts of his wife. They were obliging enough to give Mr. Tracey all the particulars which had been communicated to them by their client; and although Mr. Tracey knew that Sir Ecroyd was too clever to be otherwise than frank with him on the subject of the search for the lady, he thought there was no harm in verifying the details regarding her which he had received from the minister. The only piece of original intelligence that he got from these private inquiry agents was to the effect

that Mr. Charlton had called at his wife's bankers, and had found that she had already been with them on that morning and had drawn a considerable sum in gold and notes—a sum that should be sufficiently large to prevent her being at the necessity of making another call at the bank for several weeks, unless she was a very extravagant woman. Mr. Tracey thought that he would be doing wisely if he were to assume that she was a very extravagant woman. His experience had led him to the conclusion that most women who had differences with their husbands entailing a separation were extravagant women.

He did not say anything to Messrs. Renard & Lupus, however, on this point; but merely told them that they must have the kindness to communicate with him in the first instance in case they found out anything regarding the subject of their commission, otherwise he might not in future be able to put so many good things in their way as he had done in the past.

Mr. Renard assured his friend Mr. Tracey that the firm would do nothing—except, of course, take money from Mr. Charlton—without first acquainting Mr. Tracey with whatever they might chance to discover.

As for Julian Charlton, he dined at his club, and went home afterward to dress, in order to put in an appearance among a few hundred other people in a drawing room. He would not give anyone a chance of suggesting that something had occurred to interfere with the meeting of all his social engagements. In a day or two at the farthest—for were not these confidential agents marvelously clever fellows?—he would have Bertha by his side again, and there would not be a breath of scandal regarding her leaving his house. All that was necessary to be done was to maintain his even course in society until she returned. Consequently he thought fit to dress this evening and appear alone at the social function for which he had engaged himself. He

had only to apologize for the absence of Mrs. Charlton, who had, unfortunately, he said, been so knocked up with the unaccustomed festivities of the past few weeks that her doctor had ordered her without a moment's delay back to Brackenshire.

The loneliness of driving in his brougham to and from the house where the entertainment took place was appalling to him ; but much more appalling was the loneliness of his house when he returned. He had been accustomed to smoke a cigarette by the side of Bertha on returning with her every night, while they chatted about the toilets, the music, the guests—it had been delightful, until that madness had taken hold of him.

How could he ever have said a word of unkindness to her, he asked himself as he now sat alone in his bedroom. Sir Ecroyd had confessed that he had been in love with her from the day he met her at Lady Ashenthorpe's garden party ; and he had declared that he meant to try to induce her to marry him. Only for a moment did a jealous pang shoot through Charlton. Then he was able to smile, as he contemplated the possibility of the minister succeeding.

He could not entertain a doubt of her now.

Even though he knew that he had behaved with inconceivable brutality to her he believed that she would forgive him.

He recalled what Sir Ecroyd had told him regarding the horrible insult to which she had been subjected by the scoundrel whose punishment he had witnessed. What a fool he had been to fancy—no, not to fancy—only to fancy that he fancied that the troubled expression which she wore on that night was due to some other cause than that horrible incident about which Sir Ecroyd had spoken to him !

The unhappy girl ! Instead of having such comforting words spoken to her by the man whom she had trusted with *all her soul* as should make her forget the insult that had

been offered to her, she had been met by him with coldness and suspicion. And then, the next night, she had overheard him speak those words which came from the bitterness of his heart : " She is not my wife."

He knew that those words represented the anguish that he had been suffering for days ; but he knew that they were not the less cruel when overheard by Bertha.

How could he explain them ?

He sprang to his feet.

" I shall not make any attempt to explain," he cried. " If she has not already found out, or if she will not have found out by the time we meet again, that the sort of life we were leading—the form of union which I was weak enough to yield to—is founded on an error and cannot be maintained as society is at present constituted—if she has not learned that it develops one's worst and not one's best nature, it is better that we should never meet again."

He paced the room for hours—until all the objects in the room had become luminous in the morning light. The possibility of never meeting her again was too terrible to permit of his having a moment of sleep, he knew. But surely she had come to perceive the truth of her position, he thought. Surely that gross insult to which she had been subjected must have convinced her that the theories of life upon which she had acted and induced him to act did not possess the elements of stability. Finally he recalled what Mr. Hardy had said regarding the most important influence to which Bertha could be subjected, in order to induce her to return to her home. The possibility to which Mr. Hardy had alluded caused all Julian's tender feelings to be aroused. He fell on his knees and cried aloud in a passion of tears, " O God ! O God ! give her back to me—give her back to me !"

That is the prayer of the widower beside the grave of the *woman whose life he has made such a hell* that an eternity

of heaven would but indifferently compensate for her sufferings. God is so just that not only does he not answer the prayer of the widower, but he usually provides him with another wife of such strength of character as causes the sufferings of the first to be amply avenged.

If ever a marriage is made in heaven, under the especial supervision of the highest powers therein, it is the marriage of the widower to a Woman of Determination, after he has ill treated his first wife.

"Give her back to me," he cries in his passion of grief.

He would like to have another trial. But he does not get it.

God knows man a little better than that.

He may now and again give a man over for the devil to do his worst upon him ; but he has never yet given the wife back to the husband who has ill-treated her to death.

CHAPTER LII.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A CLEW.

JULIAN CHARLTON remained in his house all the next day. He was waiting to receive a visit from one of the firm of private inquiry agents. He had frequently heard of the astuteness of Messrs. Renard & Lupus, and if they possessed any ability whatever, surely they had now a chance of displaying it ! The finding of Bertha was not a matter that demanded any extraordinary powers, only the ordinary astuteness of a private inquiry bureau.

Messrs. Renard & Lupus called their office a bureau. The word suggested the United States, and the United States suggested extraordinary astuteness.

He was surprised when the evening came without bringing any message or messenger from the agents. He lunched at home, but meant to dine at his club, for the loneliness of the house had become oppressive to him. He drove to the bureau and was fortunate enough to find Mr. Lupus there. Mr. Lupus looked extremely knowing. To look knowing is to suggest that you know a great deal more than you would like to confess under the most extraordinary pressure.

Mr. Lupus said that his men had not actually succeeded in discovering the whereabouts of the lady ; but they had a clew. Mr. Charlton would be kept fully informed as to how the clew operated.

This was satisfactory, in a measure, to Mr. Charlton, but when the next day passed without any more definite result he did not feel quite so satisfied. He asked Mr. Lupus *what was the nature of the clew that he held*, but Mr. Lupus

smiled and looked more knowing than ever. The secrets of the profession could not be divulged, he said. The machinery which he had at his command was so sensitive that it was liable to be dislocated unless treated with the greatest delicacy. Mr. Charlton might rest assured that his best interests were considered by a maintenance of secrecy.

Mr. Charlton said he could not see why he should not be made acquainted with whatever clew was in the hands of Messrs. Renard & Lupus. He trusted, at any rate, that there would be no expense spared in the search. At this point Mr. Lupus brightened up and assured his client that no expense would be spared. He was perfectly sincere in making this assurance. Whatever means of discovery were spared by Messrs. Renard & Lupus, expense was not among them.

The next day Julian had a visit from one of Messrs. Renard & Lupus' men. He was certainly the most stupid looking man Julian had ever seen; but he reflected that this appearance of dullness could not but be to the advantage of any man in his profession, as it tended to deceive people with whom he came in contact, leading them to fancy that he was excessively stupid instead of being what Julian believed to be just the opposite—an officer in the employment of the most noted private inquiry bureau in London.

Could it be possible that this man was trying to look knowing after the manner of his chief, Charlton wondered. The smile and confidential wink of the man certainly suggested that this was his aim. He signally failed in impressing Charlton with his knowingness. A more foolish looking fellow he had never seen. The profound depth of his stupidity was shown in his effort to impress Julian that he was knowing.

He put some apparently silly questions to Mr. Charlton,

comparing his answers with some notes which he seemed to have made in the usual greasy pocketbook. Then he reclasped the book and put it into his pocket, saying quietly :

"We've spotted her."

"If you mean to say that you have discovered the whereabouts of the lady for whom your masters have been paid to search," said Julian, "you might perhaps choose more suitable language for expressing yourself to that effect."

"I'll bring you, sir, to the 'ouse where our young woman is lying purdoo, as the French says."

"Put on your hat, my man, and come along," said Julian. "Bring me to the house you talk of."

"If you'll be cautious, sir," said the man. "If you'll give me your word as a gentleman that you'll not make a mess of my discovery all at once, I'll bring you there."

"Come along," said Julian.

The detective, without further attempting to make conditions, followed him outside. A hansom was hailed and he whispered the address to the driver. It was to a street in Pimlico that the hansom was brought ; the driver was paid and dismissed, and the detective, leading Julian from street to street, explained at considerable length how he had been a bit too clever for the hansom driver ; he had told him the wrong address. It wasn't likely, he explained, that he was going to give himself away so easily to a hansom driver.

He stopped at the end of a quiet street.

"Number thirty-two," he whispered. "You stand here, sir, while I reckonoiter, as the French says. She mostly sits at a window on the ground floor reading. I'll see if she is there now, and come round to you by one of the back streets. I'm a bit too smart to come straight back to you.

"Would it not be easier for you to make some sign to me if she is sitting there, so that I can follow you up at once?" suggested Julian.

"Lor' bless you!" said the man, "if the people about saw me signaling to you—even if it was only waving my 'at or blowing three blasts on a whistle, they'd suspect that summat was up, and our game would be over. Civilians 'ave no caution. It takes us."

"Look here, my man," said Julian. "You walk up past that house. If the lady is at the window, as you say she usually is at this hour, put your left hand into your pocket. If she's not there, walk straight on as before."

"Well, if it don't turn out all right, don't blame me, that's all," said the detective.

He strolled up the street whistling so loudly to impress the passers-by with his nonchalance that the people stared at him and wondered what he was up to. When he came opposite number thirty-two he glared in at the window, and looking back at Charlton stuffed his hand into his coat pocket three times and then walked on.

Surely there never was such a fool in any employment, Julian thought as he walked down the street. But in spite of his acquaintance with the man's stupidity, he felt his heart beating quickly as he approached the house number thirty-two. If Bertha had wished to hide herself effectively, she could not have chosen a better street for the purpose. He walked on and almost gave a gasp as he turned his glance casually to the window into which the detective had glared.

He gave a greater gasp when he saw sitting at that window a young woman with a complexion of magnolia balm, and hair of a tint of gold that is supplied, not by nature in her most lavish mood, but by the coiffeur at half a crown a bottle—a young woman who smiled at him in the most gracious manner possible, considering that he was a total stranger.

A hansom was passing. Julian hailed it and gave the driver his address. He left the detective to look after *himself*.

He was somewhat surprised to find a second hansom waiting outside the door of his house as he drove up.

"A lady is waiting to see you, in the drawing room, sir," said the footman.

A curious thought seized upon him. What if it should be Bertha who had returned for some purpose, having disguised herself so as to deceive the servants! He had frequently read in works of fiction of the extraordinary possibilities of disguise possessed by a woman's veil. In the absence of a veil colored spectacles have been known to deceive—in fiction—even a husband and children for years.

He went up to the drawing room, and was greeted by Mrs. Hardy.

"Do you bring me news of her?" he cried. "Say that you have found her for me."

"Calm yourself," said the lady. "I bring you news of her—not directly. She has gone back to Australia."

He fell into a chair, and stared blankly out of the nearest window.

"Back to Australia," he muttered.

"Back to Australia, indeed," said Mrs. Hardy.

"Fool—fool—fool! Not to have thought of that at the first," said he. "But she is gone. It only remains for me to follow her—to follow her to the uttermost ends of the earth. How have you heard this, Mrs. Hardy?" he asked, turning to that lady.

"Eric Vicars it was who suggested it," she replied. "He wrote to the two steamship companies that take passengers to Australia to ask if any berths had been taken for Miss Lancaster or Mrs. Charlton—you see we did not know whether she would still keep your name or——"

"Yes, yes, of course; and he got a reply?"

"From one company saying that no berths had been taken *under either name*. From the second he received this."

She handed him a letter and he read it.

"SIR :

"In reply to your favor of the 13th inst., I beg to say that two berths have been secured for Miss Lancaster and maid aboard our steamship *Pango Pango*, which leaves Utterport for Adelaide, Sydney, and Melbourne on Thursday the 17th inst.

"I have the honor to be, sir,

"Yours respectfully,

"Per pro, the Antipodean Steamship Co. (Ltd.),

"J. B. D."

"Great Heavens !" cried Julian. "To-day is Thursday, the 17th. The steamer has sailed from Utterport. This letter was written on the 15th. Why did you not bring it to me yesterday?"

"I had not got it myself, Mr. Charlton," said Mrs. Hardy. "Eric is in the country. You know that Bertha bought a large farm for him."

"I heard nothing of this."

"That is rather strange. Oh, I recollect, she said to me that you had taken a dislike to Eric, and that you had told her that she might give him any money she wished, provided that she did not mention his name. Oh, yes ; this is the letter I received from him inclosing the one you have. Yes, he says, 'I got the inclosed to-day'—that was yesterday—'and I think you had better post it to Charlton. It will relieve his mind. I don't care about him personally ; but still I have a heart and——'"

"What if the steamer may be delayed at Utterport?" shouted Julian. "I may still be in time."

He made a rush for the door and returned in a few moments with an open railway guide.

"There is a train at 5.10," he cried. "Can I reach the station in sixteen minutes? By Heavens, I'll try. I'll take your hansom, Mrs. Hardy."

Not a word could Mrs. Hardy utter. She watched him

from the window show the driver half a sovereign as he got into the hansom, and she heard the rattle of the vehicle out of the square. It was some time before she had sufficiently recovered to go downstairs and explain to the footman that Mr. Charlton had been called away suddenly on important business. The footman appeared to be profoundly indifferent to all business considerations. He opened the door, and the lady went down the steps.

At the risk of a prosecution for furious driving, the hansom driver earned his half sovereign. The railway station was reached a minute before the departure of the train. At the end of that minute Charlton was on his way to Utterport.

He had no thought but the one—" *Shall I be in time?* "

The rattle of the axles of the train and the reverberations of the banks and the cuttings seemed to be shouting that question, " *Shall I be in time?* "

The letter from the steamship company had not stated any hour for the departure of the vessel on " Thursday the 17th inst." Surely it was not too much to infer from that that the vessel would not sail until late in the day.

He had great hope that he would arrive in time to leap aboard the steamer and either bring Bertha back with him or go on with her to Australia.

The train stopped at many stations on the route to Utterport, and the station-masters were of that highly respectable class of men who enjoy a chat with the passengers, and are ready to give ample expression to their views on any agricultural question. Many such chats were enjoyed by everyone, except Charlton, in the train.

" A highly respectable man, that station master," a fellow-passenger remarked to Julian, after an unusually protracted conversation on the Irish question. " A highly respectable man, sir ; he was once a bank porter."

The passenger seemed to be under the impression that

the fact of his being on speaking terms with a person possessing such undoubted guarantees of respectability conferred distinction upon the whole compartment.

Charlton said "Indeed!" and relapsed once more, turning all his attention to the solution of the question which was being rattled out from every carriage and thundered through the horrible blackness of the tunnels, "*Shall I be in time?*"

At last he caught a glimpse of the sea, glittering in light ripples beneath the gold of the declining sun. Ships were in the distance—the white sails of cutter yachts, the thin, dark line of a steamer's smoke, the monstrous mass of an ironclad, the canvas of a fishing boat—he saw all these, and he felt the salt sea breeze upon his face as he looked out of the carriage window.

The terminus at Utterport is at the quay side. When Julian left the carriage he ran to the place of exit from the station. A quay porter with a brass badge on his arm was standing outside.

"If you show me the Australian liner *Pango Pango* I'll give you half a crown," he said. "Can you show me her?"

"Certainly, sir; no difficulty in the world about that," said the man. "But you must hurry, sir, or you will be too late."

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! I am in time," thought Julian as he followed the porter, who had broken into a trot.

The man hurried along the quay side for a few hundred yards and then crossed to the breakwater, which, as everyone knows, is surmounted by a granite parapet breast-high. At one side of the breakwater are the quays, at the other is the open Channel. The porter ran up the high stone steps and Julian followed him until they were side by side, with *their heads above the granite of the parapet.*

"We're just in time, sir," cried the man, breathing hard.

"Just in time?" said Julian.

"Yes, sir; we can just see the craft. There she is, sir; that's the *Pango Pango*."

He pointed to a line of black smoke five miles out in the Channel.

CHAPTER LIII.

ON SOME GRAINS OF COMFORT.

IT was half-past ten o'clock when Julian Charlton returned to London. He drove at once to the house in Chelsea, and found both Mr. and Mrs. Hardy in the stuffy sitting room. He told them how he had arrived just half an hour too late to be able to board the *Pango Pango*, and asked them for their advice under the circumstances. A couple of months before he would have laughed at the idea of asking the advice of such persons. He had always regarded Mrs. Hardy as the most commonplace woman whom he had ever met, and he had looked on her husband as a ridiculous kind of person.

Now, however, he felt that he had reason to revise his opinions regarding the lady as well as her husband. Mrs. Hardy had shown herself, in respect of the letter, to be prompt, in spite of her deeply founded prejudice against rapidity of action—leaving stone steps out of the question altogether. Mr. Hardy had not merely shown himself to be a true prophet, he had spoken words of wisdom and words of hope in the hearing of Julian a few days before. Julian was glad to be able to go to them and take counsel with them as to what he should now do, having failed to reach the Australian liner before she had left Utterport.

The advice which they gave him Julian believed to be wise ; it coincided with his own views ; and he left Chelsea feeling more impressed than ever with the soundness of the wisdom of the secretary to the carnisolists.

They agreed with him that what he should do was to telegraph to the first port where the *Pango Pango* should

cast anchor, telling Bertha that he was following her by the next steamer; and then to take a passage by the next steamer to Sydney.

He determined to take this advice, which he had suggested to Mr. and Mrs. Hardy as embodying the course which he should adopt under the circumstances.

The Antipodean Line steamers make the voyage round the Cape. If the *Pango Pango* had sailed for the voyage by the Mediterranean he would have had no difficulty in overtaking her at Marseilles, Naples, or Brindisi. But there was no convenient overland route to Madeira. There was no shorter way of reaching Funchal than by the steamship *Pango Pango*. All that he could do was to telegraph, and wait for the next steamer.

He walked to his house, and before ringing for something to eat and drink, he sat down and wrote his letter to Messrs. Renard & Lupus, directing them to refrain from making any further attempt to discover the whereabouts of the lady about whom he had instructed them, and asking them to let him know for what amount he should send them a check. He sent his letter to its destination by messenger, and it was handed over to Mr. Tracey of Scotland Yard within an hour, and its contents brought under the notice of Sir Ecroyd Fairleigh on his return from the House at half-past twelve o'clock.

"What does it mean, Tracey?" asked the minister. "Has she gone back to her husband, do you fancy?"

"Hard to say, Sir Ecroyd," said Tracey. "Might I ask if there is a baby in the custody of the father—that is, of the husband?"

"There is none," replied the minister.

"They usually take a run back to have a look at the bady, Sir Ecroyd," remarked the detective. "And as there's none in this case, it's my belief that Mr. Charlton has only got tired of waiting for Lupus to do something.

He was at the bureau very impatient a couple of days ago. You should have seen the man that Lupus put on the job for him, Sir Ecroyd—one of their Gamps."

"Their what?"

"Their Gamps, we call them, Sir Ecroyd. They invent good names for queer proceedings in Ireland, Sir Ecroyd. They struck upon the word 'boycott' a few years ago, now they have hit upon 'shadowing.' Lupus has several shadowers, and as an umbrella does something in the way of shadowing, we call Lupus' shadowers Sarey Gamps. They put one of their Gamps on this job—a man that is fit for nothing but watching actresses' goings-on for a third party."

"I don't believe that she will return," said Sir Ecroyd after a pause. "Wherever she may be, she will not return to him of her own accord. Keep your eyes open, Tracey."

"You may depend on that, Sir Ecroyd," said the officer, touching his hat.

Julian Charlton slept more easily than he had yet done since Bertha had left him. He knew where she was. That was a great relief to his mind—to feel that he could communicate with her. She was not lost to him. The telegram which he would send to her would certainly be put into her hand; and whatever she might have felt on overhearing the cruel words which he had spoken, she would now be made to know that they meant nothing—that he still looked on himself as her husband—that he would never cease to think of her as his wife.

He sent his telegram two days later; and then he knew that there was nothing left for him but to wait for her reply.

What would that reply be, he asked himself. He knew what form of reply would be most comforting to him. If he were to receive a message bearing the words, "*I am returning*," he would ask for nothing more.

Four days passed, and then he knew that the steamer *Pango Pango* must have reached Madeira. Any moment might bring him the message that he hoped for. The fifth day passed, and yet no message was forthcoming. He could not stand the suspense of waiting indoors; he drove to the London office of the Antipodean Steamship Company, and inquired if the *Pango Pango* had reached Madeira. The clerk showed him the telegram which had been received at the office. The steamer had anchored the previous night, and was to proceed on her voyage in eighteen hours. He made a calculation; the steamer would, at the very moment that he was standing in the office, be getting under weigh in Funchal harbor. He hastened back to his house. Surely a telegram would be awaiting him!

There was none.

He waited until the next morning, and then he went to Chelsea. Mrs. Hardy had some grains of comfort for him. Perhaps Bertha might, after all, be only longing to get once more among the scenes with which she had been familiar in her early life, she said. Might it not be possible that she had taken a sudden dislike to London and London society, and was now filled with a yearning after the great pastures in the midst of which her early life had been passed? It was not only possible, but quite likely, that she had set her heart upon this, and that she therefore had refrained from telegraphing from Madeira. It might even be that she was anxious that he should follow her to Australia.

Julian clutched at this hope. He knew what Mrs. Hardy did not know regarding Bertha's last days in society. Would not a woman of the nature of Bertha endeavor to fly to the uttermost ends of the earth to escape from everything that might recall the horrible insult that had been offered to her by the wretch who had been punished by Charlie Barham?

The more he reflected upon this point, the more certain did he become that she had not replied to his telegram from Madeira in order that he might follow her.

He looked at the first page of a daily newspaper for the sailings of the Antipodean steamers from Utterport, and he found that the *Wagga Wagga* was advertised to start from Utterport the next day.

Without a moment's delay he called on the agent from whom he had obtained the house, and gave him instructions to settle with the servants and to take charge of the house once again for its owner. He told his own man to pack up a couple of portmanteaus, and the next morning he started for Utterport.

CHAPTER LIV.

ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE EXPERIMENT.

THE town of Utterport seemed to be holding high festival. Two bands were braying away, one at the head and the other at the tail of a great procession of well-dressed, rosy-cheeked, good humored looking men, the majority of whom were passing jests among themselves. They carried several banners bearing such legends as "Down with the Docks!" "The Men are the Masters!" "More Pay and More Play!" "Black Eyes to the Black Legs!"

At various places along the route men were standing on barrels addressing the crowds, and enforcing their arguments by liberal gesticulation and the crashing of the right fist into the left palm. The cheers that greeted almost every thump made a fitting vocal accompaniment to the braying of the bands.

In a moment Julian perceived what this unusual state of things meant. The annual festival of the trades unionists—a general strike—was taking place. It was on this account the bands were playing and the banners flying. This was the origin of the gayety and the joyous humor manifested by the procession. The new dock had just reached a critical point in its recovery after the depression of years, and required most careful treatment; the dock laborers had been earning eighteen shillings a day, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had just been receiving a surplus of about a million from extra duty on rum. It was at this stage that the self-appointed guardians of the interests of the men had ordered the holding of the festival of New Unionism—a general strike.

Julian got his portmanteaus put upon a cab, and drove down the docks to the berth of the Antipodean Steamship Company, at which the *Wagga Wagga* was lying. No laborers were to be seen in any direction. Scores of steamers and fine vessels were lying in the docks, waiting to be discharged; but the holds were covered with their hatches and tarpaulins. The *Wagga Wagga* was announced to start on her voyage on this day; but her decks did not suggest a speedy release. Only half her cargo was stowed; steam had not been got up in her boilers. The sailors were engaged painting and polishing and varnishing.

Julian went aboard, and found the chief steward, and that functionary explained that the strike had occurred the previous day. The man had not the least idea what had occurred to induce the leaders to order a strike, but the general impression was that it was due to the circumstance that a clerk in one of the agent's offices had employed a shoeblack who did not belong to any recognized union to clean his boots. This was considered an offense which the New Unionism could not possibly allow to pass without notice; so the four thousand men in the docks were commanded to leave off work.

But the steamer was announced to sail that day, Julian reminded the steward.

"We're in the hands of the men, sir," said the steward. "We can do nothing without their permission. Long ago, in the religious days, sir, you may remember that the sailings of the steamers were always announced with the D. V.—meaning, I believe, God willing—before the date. The owners would do well to put the letters in again sir; the D. meaning the dockers."

"But surely you will make some move," said Julian.

"The agent was here an hour ago, sir," replied the man; "and he said whether or not we got the rest of the cargo aboard the steamer we should start to-morrow night."

“Then I may as well choose a cabin for myself,” said Julian. “What about the staterooms abaft the deck house? I should like a berth there. Are they all engaged?”

The steward referred to his plan of the cabins.

“Let me see, sir,” he said. “I can give you the upper bunk in the starboard deck house. The port deck house was taken three days ago for a gentleman and his wife—yes, there are the names—‘Mr. and Mrs. Julian Charlton for Sydney.’”

“Mr. and Mrs.—” cried Julian.

“Charlton, sir; I think that’s the name. Look for yourself. Don’t you make that Charlton, sir?”

Julian glanced at the plan; beyond a doubt the name was Charlton.

“You didn’t happen to see this Mr. Charlton and his wife, steward?” he inquired.

“Not I, sir,” replied the steward. “He must have taken the deck house at the London office, and he has probably read in this morning’s papers that the strike would prevent us from sailing to-day. I wonder you didn’t see it yourself, sir.”

“I was stupid enough not to open a newspaper this morning,” said Julian. “I tell you what it is, steward, I should like to see this Mr. Charlton before I engage a berth. Would you mind sending one of the lads to me when he comes aboard? I shall put up for the night at the Black Swan, I think. It is close at hand, is it not?”

“Just outside the dock, sir; a very comfortable hotel, if a bit old-fashioned for Americans,” said the steward. “I’ll not fail to send a lad to you, sir. But what name shall he inquire for?”

“Lancaster,” said Julian. “Let him ask at the hotel for Mr. Lancaster, and I shall return to the steamer with him to see this Mr. Charlton—he may be an old friend of mine.”

“I’ll not fail, Mr. Lancaster,” said the steward. “In the

dock before a magistrate is where the dockers should be put—banners and bands and all. That's how I'd dock their finery for them, sir."

The steward seemed to be gifted with a very pretty wit. Julian wondered if it was popular among his passengers.

He did not allow this question to engross all his thoughts, however. He was still able to give some attention to the question of the identity of the persons whose names he had just seen on the list of passengers of the *Wagga Wagga*.

What could it mean, he asked himself. Who was the Mr. Julian Charlton for whom a cabin had been taken aboard the steamer! His name was not a common one. A Mr. John Brown or a Mr. John Jones might be found in the passenger list of many steamers without causing surprise to a second Mr. John Brown or Mr. John Jones; but in his case it was different. A second Julian Charlton taking a passage to Sydney might be regarded as a remarkable coincidence.

He went to the old-fashioned hotel, the Black Swan, and engaged a bedroom, tearing the labels off his portmanteaus, and giving the name of Lancaster. A small bar was at the end of the hall. It seemed that in this place the business of the house was done. School slates with memoranda on them were hanging on either side of the window. Julian communicated to the young woman who was in charge of the place his desire to see one of the cabin lads of the *Wagga Wagga* the moment he should call, inquiring for Mr. Lancaster. The young woman made a memorandum to this effect on one of the slates, and told him that it was all right.

For the rest of the day he remained in the coffeeroom reading newspapers, and thinking over the question of the names. Was it possible that the name Julian Charlton was commoner than he believed it to be?

Scarcely anyone entered the coffeeroom during the day.

The strike, it was explained to him by the waiter, had driven everyone away from the docks to the town. If it continued it would ruin the business of the Black Swan as well as the dock companies, the man assured him.

The next morning he strolled through the dock to the steamer. He learned from the steward that Mr. Charlton had not yet put in an appearance. The agent of the company was in the cabin, and he told Julian that, as there was no appearance of the men returning to work, the company had resolved to dispatch the steamer without waiting to complete her loading. The *Wagga Wagga* would leave Utterport that night, he said.

Julian returned to the hotel. The coffeeroom was on the first floor. It was a large double room. It had evidently once had folding doors in the center, separating the front room from the back, but the doors had been removed. At a table to the right of the partitioning wall, that still remained though the doors were gone, Julian seated himself and partook of lunch. Then he moved to a horsehair sofa still further in the corner of the inner room, and in spite of the horsehair and the delapidated springs he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was with a sense of familiarity with the place, for which he could not account. What was there near that should convey to him this curious sense of familiarity?

He heard the sound of voices in the outer room. He clutched spasmodically at the arm of the sofa, and gave a gasp. Had he awakened, or was it the fancy of a dream? How was it that he was listening to the voice of Bertha in conversation with someone in the outer room?

He sat motionless on the sofa, staring at the space where the folding doors had once been. Even when he had heard several sentences spoken the sensation of being asleep was still upon him. The consciousness of dreaming frequently

occurs to one in a dream. This is what he believed he was experiencing.

"I thought that I had one friend who understood me, and that that friend was you, Sir Ecroyd," Bertha was saying in her quiet tones.

A murmur in another voice followed. Julian could not recognize it as the voice of Sir Ecroyd.

"I cannot agree with you," was the response of Bertha to the words that were inaudible to Julian. "I cannot possibly agree with you. You talk of hoping that I will allow you to restore me to my place in society. The expression of such a hope is—no, I will not call it an insult—I will only say that it deprives you of whatever regard I may once have had for you, Sir Ecroyd—it brings you very close to my contempt. I have really nothing more to say to you on this subject."

"You cannot understand me." Julian had now no difficulty in recognizing the cold, measured words of the minister. "You cannot understand me. Did I speak a word to you regarding my hopes so long as you were under the protection of—of that man? But you know as well as I do that I overheard with you the words that he spoke the last evening we were together. 'She is not my wife—she is not my wife.' Did not those words set you free?"

There was a long pause before the voice of Bertha sounded like a wail of agony.

"O God, my God! to think that even this man cannot understand what was in my heart—what is in my heart still!"

"No one has understood you as I have," said Sir Ecroyd. "No eyes but mine saw how you were suffering those last days. Do you believe that if you were my wife you would know any suffering? Do you believe——"

"I will ask you to leave this room," said Bertha in a clear and unfaltering voice. "You have my contempt now, *in place of* the regard I felt for you. You have insulted

me as that wretch insulted me—you assume that I was a man's mistress and not his wife."

"You heard what he said, and yet you call yourself his wife?"

"Sir Ecroyd, if you do not leave this room I will ask you to allow me to leave it. Stay, I will go."

There was a long pause, and then the words in a low tone.

"I have not understood you, Mrs. Charlton. I will leave you."

In another moment there came to Julian's ears the sound of the shutting of the outer door.

He struggled to his feet as a sob reached his ear; but before he could take a step toward the room where he now knew Bertha was sitting, the outer door was opened with some degree of boisterousness, and the familiar voice of Eric Vicars was heard.

"I have found you, my fine lady," said the ex-overseer, with a laugh. "O Bertha, I'm ashamed of you—I'm really ashamed of you. How could you demean yourself? Is this how you treat my confidence?"

"What do you mean?" said Bertha. "Your confidence? Do not talk nonsense, Eric. Please go away."

"I'll not go away," said he. "I'm too fond of you to go away, Bertha—no, I may be rough, but I've got a heart; I'll stay. O Bertha, I would not have believed this of you. If I had thought you meant to come down here I would not have showed you the letter from the company stating that he and she—and *she*, mind you; oh, the scoundrel!—were going off together, leaving you in the lurch. Why have you come here? Do you fancy that you will be able to prevail on him to stay? Not you—not you——"

"I need not tell you why I am here," said Bertha. "You would not understand why I am here to see him before he leaves."

"You will not demean yourself by doing that, Bertha,"

cried Eric. "Oh, that your father's daughter should descend to such a depth as this!"

"Go away," said she. "Can you not see the trouble that I am in? Go away."

"Look here, Bertha," said he; "I want to help you; that is why I followed you down here. I said: 'She may see by the papers that the strike has delayed the steamer, and she may have a wish to say good-by to him, so my poor foolish big heart sent me off here. Now if you've made up your mind that you must see him, let me bring him to you here. Don't you think of waiting for him aboard the steamer—you don't want to see *her*, I suppose. You wait here, and I'll stay by the steamer, and if it's necessary to drag him here by sheer force, by my soul, I'll do it for you, Bertha."

"You are quite right, Eric," she replied after a pause. "I had better remain here. But you will bring him to me here. You will tell him that I have no word of reproach for him—only forgiveness—only forgiveness."

"If I have to drag him by the throat I'll bring him to your feet," cried Eric between his set teeth. "I'll go at once."

"You scoundrel!" said Julian, coming from his corner in the other room, and facing Eric, who stood, as if turned to stone, staring at the intruder.

"O Julian, Julian! I need you beside me. I am weak, dearest; you are strong."

The words came like the cry of a child from Bertha. She was standing with her hands outstretched to him. He paid no attention to her.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he said, facing Eric. "I suspected you from the first. Now I know your villainy. You took a cabin in the last steamer in her name, and then got the letter conveyed to me that I might fancy she had gone away from me, and now you have tried to trick her in the

same way—you tried to make her believe that I had deserted her, and that I was not going away alone. Is that the truth, or is it a falsehood? Bah! do not try to reply. The expression on your face is enough. You forged my name. If you are in England after the sailing of that steamer to-night, you shall awake inside a jail. No, not a word shall you speak to her. Go."

He opened the door. The ex-overseer made a mute appeal to Bertha—he thought of his heart at the last minute and pressed his fist to the portion of his waistcoat which might reasonably be supposed to be separated by only an inch or so from that organ. Julian gave a very ugly laugh as he closed the door.

He turned and faced her. There was a long pause before he cried:

"My beloved, my beloved!"

He got no further. His feet gave way beneath him. He fell upon his knees at her feet, clutching at her hands, and bathing them with his tears.

"Julian—O Julian; it seems that I have been blind—oh, blind, up to the present. But now the scales have fallen from my eyes. I see all clearly. I did not know the world, Julian—I did not know myself. I thought that I was different from other women. I now know that I am not different. You did not cease to love me, Julian, did you?"

"My darling—my darling—not for a moment. It was that false life which we were living, Bertha—it was that which made me see everything in a distorted form."

"We will not go back to that false life again, Julian. You will take me to some place far away where—*where—where we can be married.*"

And so he did.

They went to a distant village in Cornwall, and there they were joined in holy matrimony by a duly licensed priest of

the Established Church of the land—the Church which is so venerated in Cornish villages.

They returned after a month to the Court.

The rector, paying them a formal visit, and taking Julian aside, inquired if it was true what Lady Rushton had stated, to the effect that he had not thought it necessary to go through a ceremony of marriage with the lady who went by the name of Mrs. Charlton.

"It is not true, sir," said Julian with the utmost indignation. "Lady Rushton is a gossiping old woman, and you—you should be ashamed to put such a question to me. Great Heavens, sir, what do you take me for?"

The rector was almost in tears as he offered his humble apologies. He went from the Court direct to Lady Rushton and the manner in which he spoke to her caused her to think for the first time of the advisability of joining the Dissenting community.

That is the end of the story of the interesting experiment conducted by a spiritually minded young woman on the one hand, and by a modern man of science on the other hand.

It is only necessary to say that Marian Travers went back to the Cape still unmarried; but charitable people say that, if she remains unmarried, she is certainly not to blame for it. Few people know that she gave Cyril his freedom, and that he fully appreciated the gift.

Charlie Barham passed a creditable examination for a sub-lieutenancy, and he is now a supernumerary aboard the *Mollymawk* of the Mediterranean squadron.

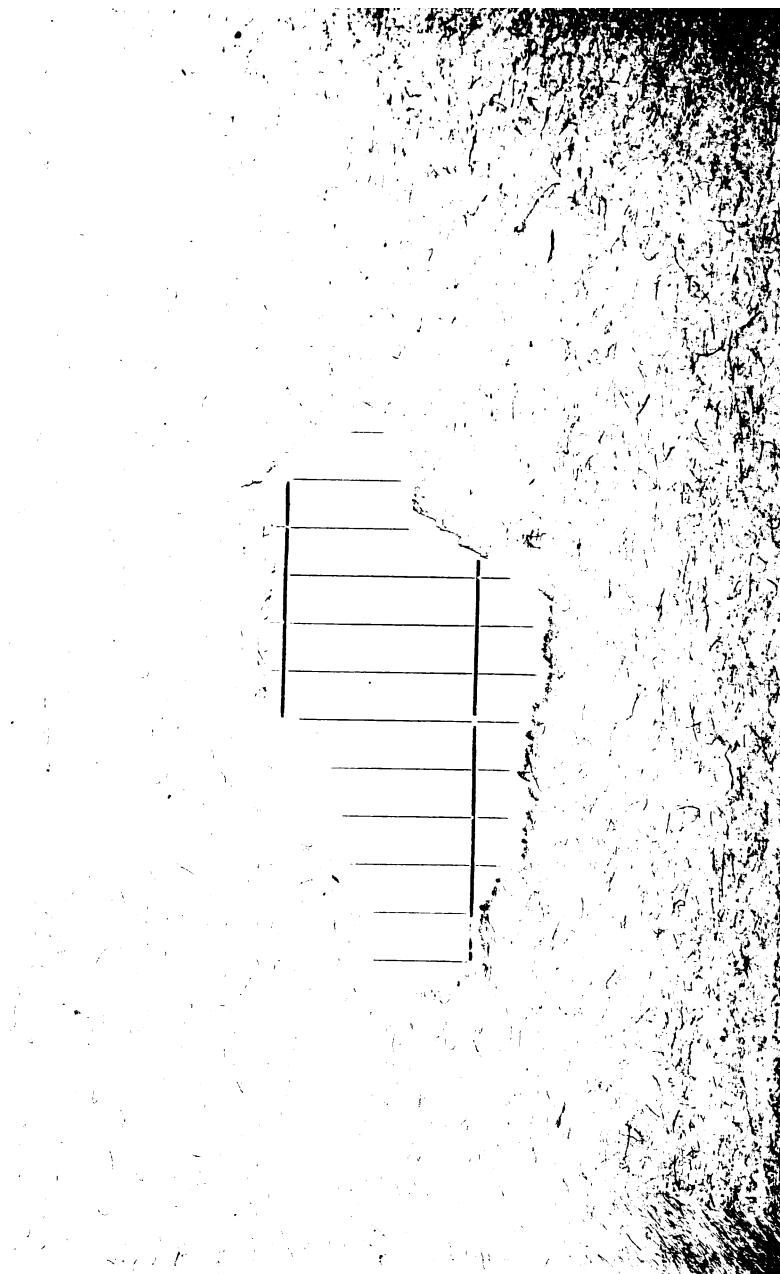
Cyril Southcote is winning a name for himself as an able administrator in the Calipash Archipelago. He is becoming so bald that people are calling him intellectual.

This is excessively annoying.

THE END.

12. 15





JUL 26 1947